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#13

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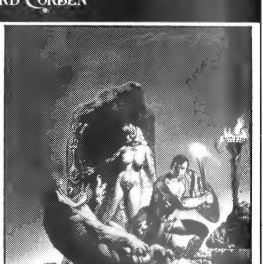

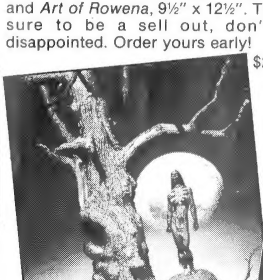

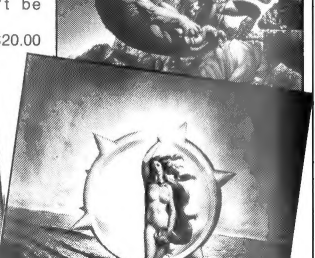

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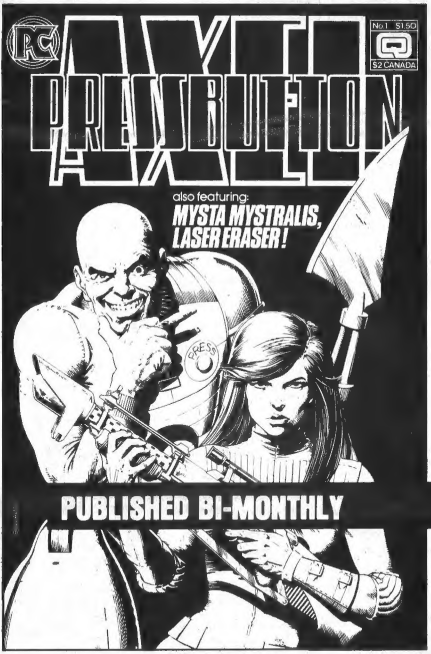

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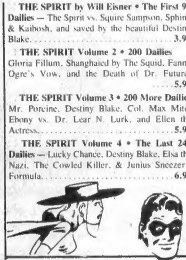

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DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT
editor/publisher

conceived by:
JIM SALICRUP
editorial and design consultant

BILL CHADWICK
managing editor
production poobah

LOU MOUGIN
LYMAN RAND
ROGER SLIFER
BRIAN TALLEY
contributing editors

LESLEY BENJAMIN
advertising manager

RICK JAGUS
JACKIE HUTCHINSON
typesetting

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MIKE CODY
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JIM NOVAK
logo

MARK EVANIER
west coast correspondent

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UP FRONT

You're probably wondering why I called you all here.

It's simple: I'm going to ask a few questions — and I want your answers.

It's easy: An opinion poll of COMICS INTERVIEW readers — just let me know your likes and dislikes, what you'd like to see more of and less of in this magazine.

It's fun: Everyone's doing it, from coast to coast — opinion polls are the sensation of the nation. Now you can take part in one, too.

All you have to do is let me know which interviews you've liked the most, and why — as well as who you'd most want us to talk to next, and what areas of comics or types of people you'd like us to cover in future issues.

If what we've been doing so far is just fine by you — let me know that, too.

We'll print the best of your answers in our letters pages, but I'll read each and every one of your responses, weighing every suggestion carefully and giving them all my personal consideration. We'll even hand out a few free subscriptions for the best ideas!

I want to hear from everyone — fans, pros, advertisers, distributors — about COMICS INTERVIEW and what we can do to make it an even *better* magazine.

It's simple, easy and fun — so make your voice heard!

-David

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TITAN

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Nemesis
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Judge Dredd's badge
Rogue Trooper
Robo-Hunter
Torquemada, from 'Nemesis'
Tharg, 2000 A.D.'s alien editor
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This impressive gold-plated badge is an exact replica of Dredd's own chest badge, with clasp, and is one of the best merchandise tie-in items ever: "It's darn near perfect. Collectors, get yours now!" – Cat Yronwode in The Comic Buyer's Guide. $4.95

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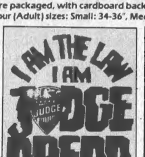
The Cursed Earth – a stunning design from the cover of 2000 A.D. No. 61, drawn by Mike McMahon.



The dramatic **Dredd logo** in red and yellow, emblazoned full-size across this shirt. Two colours.

Dredd on the Seat of Justice, reading the Book of the Law. Drawn by Brian Bolland. White on black.

The horrific face of **Judge Death** – guaranteed to scare your friends! Drawn by Brian Bolland. White on black.

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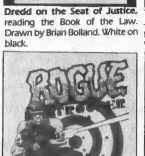

Rogue Trooper – the hero of future war in Britain's 2000 A.D. comic. Drawn by Dave Gibbons.

Judges Mortis and Death pronounce their sentence on mankind. Drawn by Brian Bolland.

Judge Dredd sits in Eisner-esque fashion on his bullet-ridden, defeated enemy – **"CRIME"**. Drawn by Mike McMahon.

The colourful band of heroic **robot warriors,** dramatically on their way into action! Drawn by Mike McMahon.

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Sam Slade, top **Robo-Hunter,** with associates Kidd, Cutie and Hoagy! Drawn by Ian Gibson.

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"Roy Thomas and I know things as screenwriters we never knew as comic-book writers."

GERRY CONWAY

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Gerry Conway
Occupation: Writer
Born: 10 September 1952 — Brooklyn, New York.
Residence: Los Angeles, California
Credits: ATARI FORCE, SUN DEVILS, FIRESTORM, JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA, FANTASTIC FOUR, AVENGERS, plus numerous other comics. Screenplays for FIRE AND ICE and CONAN THE DESTROYER.

Favorite Writers: Graham Greene, Robert B. Parker, Larry Niven.

Favorite Television Shows: HILL STREET BLUES, ST. ELSEWHERE.

Favorite Current Comics: X-MEN, IRON MAN, ELRIC, INFINITY, INC. I'm probably a minority in the creative community, but I like John Byrne's stuff very much. I think people are very cruel to Byrne when they should be applauding a major accomplishment: the fact that he is pencilling, inking, *and* writing two books a month. If he were doing just one book a month — like Simonson with THOR or Miller with DAREDEVIL — his *hubris* would be forgiven, but to be doing *two* books a month — and be doing them well . . . that's unforgiveable. *(Laughter.)*

"The first draft of CONAN II is one of

Conan — the Barry Windsor-Smith version. Opposite page: Conan — the Arnold Scharzenegger version.

Long before I began writing comics professionally, I had been following Gerry Conway's comics career with great interest — ever since I'd read that he and I were the same age. As it turned out, Gerry was my editor at both Marvel and DC at different times, and I always enjoyed working with him — although after his migration to Hollywood to start a new career as a screenwriter, our paths have crossed only sporadically. So I was glad to renew our friendship recently, and to talk with Gerry at length about his life and career. One of our chief topics of conversation was the new CONAN movie, and Gerry's role (with long-time friend and collaborator, Roy Thomas) in writing it. We also discussed his comics work, including ATARI FORCE (and how, Gerry says, DC mishandled it); the revamped JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA; why he's turning FIRESTORM over to his wife; his new series, SUN DEVILS; and the on-going war (familiar to fans of Woody Allen movies) between the hyperactive East and the mellow West . . .

DAK: *Gee, it's been so long since we talked. You've gone Big Time in the meanwhile!*

GERRY CONWAY: I don't know if I've gone Big Time. The movie business just seems like a macrocosm of the comic-book business, which in turn sometimes seems like a microcosm of the movie business. They're both very much alike.

DAK: *Well, I remember when I was seventeen, I used to look at your stuff, knowing that you were my age, and I'd think, "Damn, that Gerry Conway is my age, and look at him — he writes comics and paperbacks!" Now* I'm doing comics and paperbacks, *and you're still ahead of me! I'm tired of this!* (Laughter.)

GERRY: Listen, there are people who are years younger than me, and I feel furious when I think where they are in their careers and where I am in mine. But you can't live like that, always playing Catch-Up with someone else. You gotta be happy where you are. **Steven Spielberg** is only two years older than me. Now how am I supposed to live with that?

DAK: *Not only that, but he used to live with Amy Irving!* (Laughter.)

GERRY: You know who my inspiration was, for becoming a comic book writer? **Jim Shooter** — because **Jim Shooter** is only a year and a half older than I am, and I saw his name mentioned in a SUPERMAN story that he'd written in the mid-Sixties, and it said, "Thirteen-year-old **Jim Shooter** wrote this story," and I thought "Jesus Christ, I'm thirteen years old and I could write as well as this!"

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the great unproduced screenplays."

DAK: *You've been in California about six years now. Are you adapted?*

GERRY: I am so adapted that when I go back to New York, my skin crawls. *(Laughter.)* It's not so much a different pace. I think, as it is an intensity. You experience the same kinds of things and the same number of things, but the experiences here are not as intense and as ferocious as in New York. California has not been a Lotus Land for me — since moving here I've done even more work than I did in New York. I just feel less aggressive toward the people I work with. When we were back in New York — about three or four weeks ago — it was so loud, I felt like my ear drums were bursting! I couldn't believe that I used to thrive on that kind of environment. And there are so many people in suits in New York that it's astonishing. Normal people who should be dressed in a casual way — because of the kinds of careers they're involved in — are walking around in suits looking like academics. My sister is a CPA and looks like a nun to me! *(Laughter.)* Back in the middle Sixties when the nuns were allowed to stop dressing in habits and wear civilian clothes, they all looked like prison matrons, and I swear that's what the up-and-coming female Yuppie looks like — a prison matron! Only it's their own prison! Well, whatever suits you.

DAK: *How did you get involved with the CONAN movies?*

GERRY: Back in pre-history, Roy wrote the CONAN comic-book series. When **Ed Summer** came up with the idea of doing the first CONAN movie, he came to Roy, and Roy put him in touch with **Glenn Lord**, who at the time, represented the **Robert E. Howard** estate. Subsequently, Conan Properties was formed, and Roy was brought in as a consultant on the first CONAN movie, and he and **Ed Summer** were supposed to write the screenplay together. Well, they were bought out by **Dino de Laurentiis,** another writer was brought on, and when **John Milius** came aboard, Roy, as story consultant, offered some suggestions, some of which **Milius** agreed to, some of which he didn't like. Generally, CONAN THE BARBARIAN was **John Milius'** movie. Generally? *Specifically* that was **John Milius'** movie! *(Laughter.)* No two ways about it. Years later **Pressman** discovered — in the course of a conversation with Roy — that Roy had become fairly well established as a screenwriter. And **Pressman** said, "Gee, maybe now we should finally get together and write that screenplay." So he hired Roy and me to write the screenplay for the second CONAN movie, in collaboration with **Roger Donaldson,** the director. After two months of intensive brainstorming, we came up with a script, and in January, 1982, we finished the script. At that point **Ed Pressman** sold out completely to **Dino de Laurentiis.** He got a very tidy profit, gave us our contracts, and left! *(Laughter.)* Roy and I were brought on to rewrite our own script, from a new direction. Ironically, the first draft we wrote is now one of the great unproduced screenplays in Hollywood. It's been read by a lot of people, and gotten us a lot of work. Everyone likes it, with one exception — **Dino de Laurentiis.** *(Laughter.)* We subsequently wrote four drafts for Dino, honing the script to his specifications. Then **Richard Fleischer**, the new director, read the script, and had some ideas of his own. For instance, there was a scene which was a *tour de force* action sequence of Conan doing a dive through a tower, fifty or sixty feet, down through an open drain-hole, into a subterranean river. It was a spectacular action sequence, similar to Tarzan diving off the Brooklyn Bridge in TARZAN'S NEW YORK ADVENTURE. We designed it as an audience-rousing, get-up-out-of-your-seat-and-cheer kind of sequence.

Fleischer read it and said, "Gee, this would be kind of hard to do — can you cut it?" I think I made the mistake of saying, "Gosh, we'd like the audience to see *some* things that they've never seen before!" So Roy and I were off the picture at that point. *(Laughter.)* **Fleischer** got someone willing to do the necessary cutting, and that writer was **Stanley Mann**, the brilliant author of such films as METEOR and THE OMEN: PART II.

DAK: *Classics of their time.*

GERRY: Yeah. A true craftsman in his field. And Stanley went through the script and cut out anything that was any good in it, and rewrote the dialogue so it was nice and banal. Subsequently, when we got the credits from the **de Laurentiis** Corporation, we discovered that **Stanley Mann** had supposedly written the script from Word One. We were not even given story credit. We then brought it to the Writers Guild for arbitration, and the Writers Guild read the screenplay and gave us sole story credit, acknowledging that everything that was in the story was ours. They did not, however, give us what we felt we deserved, which was shared screenplay credit with **Mann.** So

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THE SECOND YEAR

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Dynamo Joe
E-Man
Grimjack
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Mars
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Starslayer
Warp

GRAPHIC NOVEL

Beowulf

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Del Close
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Mike Grell
Marc Hempel
Paul Kupperberg
Charles Meyerson
John Ostrander
Joe Staton
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Mark Wheatley

ARTISTS

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I CAN MAKE YOU A RICH MAN --A KING, ALMOST!

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Conan as depicted by Jim Starlin and Al Milgrom for SAVAGE TALES #5.

Mann has the sole screenplay credit. That's the breaks.

DAK: *Well, how many different versions of the screenplay did you go through?*

GERRY: Five drafts.

DAK: *What keeps you sane through all that?*

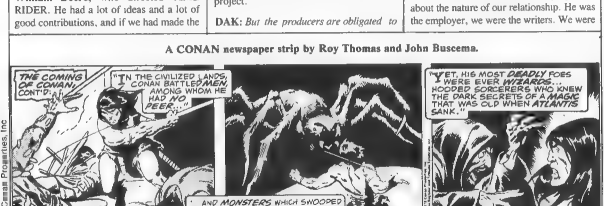
GERRY: We worked with three different directors, and each of them had his own priorities. **Roger Donaldson**, who then went on to work for **de Laurentiis** on THE BOUNTY, was a man with a great deal of vision, and had a very good idea of what a CONAN movie could be. Working with him, we produced what we considered one of the great screenplays of our career. After **Donaldson,** we worked with a guy named **William Deere,** who directed TIME RIDER. He had a lot of ideas and a lot of good contributions, and if we had made the movie he and Roy and I had come up with, it would have been a really dynamite action film. Then along comes **Richard Fleischer**, whose basic goal for the two months of filming seems to be to not get out of the director's chair. He just didn't want to be bothered with anything that would challenge him.

How do we keep ourselves sane? Well, what you have to do is to accept that each draft is a totally new picture, a totally new project. Sometimes you can actually convince yourself — if you try hard enough *(laughter)* — that what you're doing is better, but I don't think that's really necessary. You just have to convince yourself that you're doing the best you can do, on a different kind of story and a different kind of project.

DAK: *But the producers are obligated to pay you a new fee for each rewrite, correct?*

GERRY: Oh, yeah. Speaking for myself, I'd have preferred if they had just shot our first draft and not paid us for all those rewrites. But as long as they're going to make us write new screenplays, they should pay us to write new screenplays. If any of the changes Dino had asked us to make had been because of failures on our part — in storytelling or characterization — I think we would have felt that we had an obligation to make the changes. But these were changes such as, "Gee, let's change this Chinaman to a Mexican." We had a lot of strange changes like that. Dino — in a very ironic way — is one of the best people we've ever worked for, because he was very up-front about the nature of our relationship. He was the employer, we were the writers. We were

A CONAN newspaper strip by Roy Thomas and John Buscema.


THE COMING OF CONAN! CONT'D
IN THE CIVILIZED LANDS CONAN BATTLED MEN, AMONG WHOM HE HAD NO PEER...
AND MONSTERS WHICH SWOOPED DOWN FROM THE SKY OR SHAMBLED FORTH FROM SHADOW-GUARDED TOMBS.
YET, HIS MOST DEADLY FOES WERE EVER WIZARDS... HOODED SORCERERS WHO KNEW THE DARK SECRETS OF A MAGIC THAT WAS OLD WHEN ATLANTIS SANK...
ROY & JOHN THOMAS BUSCEMA

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even more in '84

monthly

CEREBUS

JOURNEY

bimonthly

NEIL the HORSE

NORMALMAN

twice yearly

SWORDS of CEREBUS

Aardvark Vanaheim

"Producers psyche you up, then drop you."

working for *him*. We weren't pretending to be buddies hanging out together, making a great movie, which is what sometimes producers do — they psyche you up emotionally by pretending to be your pal, and then when their needs change, they drop you. And you're sort of left hanging there with kind of a stunned expression on your face, never even being invited to the screening. We would never have been expected to be invited to the screening of CONAN II. We *did* expect to be invited to the screening of FIRE AND ICE, and we weren't! *(Laughter.)* We were **Ralph Bakshi's** pals, and when that relationship changed, he reverted to a "Who are you guys?" attitude.

DAK: *Well, have you seen any of this new CONAN movie?*

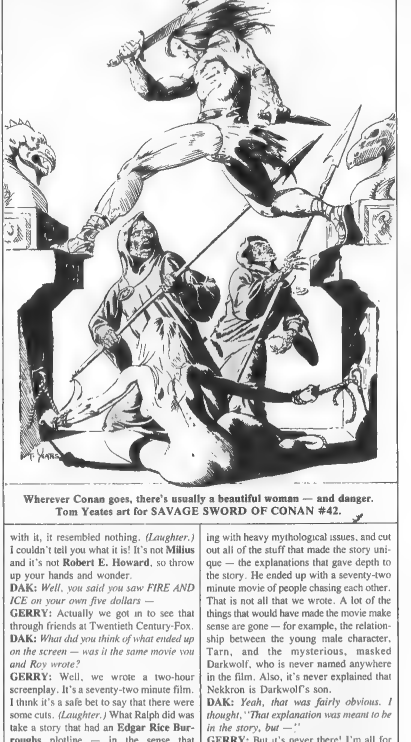
GERRY: Not a cut. I'll have to pay my five bucks to see it like everybody else. In fields such as comics, or movies, where the people who are the practitioners are doing it for a childhood love of the medium, we tend to think that people are going to take care of us like children, and our relationships are going to be family kind of relationships. That's just not true. In every case — comics, movies, whatever — it's a business, and when business needs change, every other relationship changes. It just makes it more painful if you think you had a personal relationship with someone, who then turns around and stabs you in the back! *(Laughter.)* But if you acknowledge that this person is going to stab you in the back, and you keep that in mind all the way through, then you're ready and in a position of defense when it happens.

DAK: *So essentially, even though the movie may have been blanderized, it's still your story?*

GERRY: Oh, yeah. That's what the Writers Guild says. They gave us sole story credit. It was not shared with **Stanley Mann**. The screenplay Roy and I wrote has been bowdlerized, but I think people who know our work will recognize a lot of elements in it from Roy's material, from my material, and from our whole attitude towards storytelling. It may actually turn out to be a very successful movie, simply because we managed to do one thing — we directed them toward making a sword-and-sorcery movie, not a sword movie. So substantially, this is going to be different from the first film, in that there's going to be a lot more fantasy in it — not as much as we might have put in, because they cut out a lot of that, from the final draft, but certainly a lot more than was in the first film.

DAK: *Would you say it resembles more the comic book version of CONAN than the first movie?*

GERRY: When **Stanley Mann** got through with it, it resembled nothing. *(Laughter.)* I couldn't tell you what it is! It's not **Milius** and it's not **Robert E. Howard**, so throw up your hands and wonder.



Wherever Conan goes, there's usually a beautiful woman — and danger. Tom Yeates art for SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN #42.

DAK: *Well, you said you saw FIRE AND ICE on your own five dollars —*

GERRY: Actually we got in to see that through friends at Twentieth Century-Fox.

DAK: *What did you think of what ended up on the screen — was it the same movie you and Roy wrote?*

GERRY: Well, we wrote a two-hour screenplay. It's a seventy-two minute film. I think it's a safe bet to say that there were some cuts. *(Laughter.)* What Ralph did was take a story that had an **Edgar Rice Burroughs** plotline — in the sense that characters came together, had an interaction, went away, chased back and forth — and in addition, had some thematic material dealing with heavy mythological issues, and cut out all of the stuff that made the story unique — the explanations that gave depth to the story. He ended up with a seventy-two minute movie of people chasing each other. That is not all that we wrote. A lot of the things that would have made the movie make sense are gone — for example, the relationship between the young male character, Tarn, and the mysterious, masked Darkwolf, who is never named anywhere in the film. Also, it's never explained that Nekkron is Darkwolf's son.

DAK: *Yeah, that was fairly obvious. I thought, "That explanation was meant to be in the story, but —"*

GERRY: But it's never there! I'm all for subtlety, but not to the point of obscurity. Apparently that was all **Frank Frazetta's** wish. He apparently convinced Ralph that

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even more in '84

from aardvark-vanaheim

"When I go back to New York, my skin crawls."

the audience didn't really want to know what's going on. *(Laughter.)* **Frazetta** — who is not a verbal man — I mean, he's a painter, and his instincts are primarily visual — seemed to have the feeling that people wanted to leave the theater totally confused, and that would make everything seem much more meaningful and mystical. In point of fact, when we saw the screening and the lights went on, my lawyer, who had been invited along, said, "Who was that masked man?" *(Laughter.)* I said, "Yes, we were asking the same question ourselves!"

DAK: *It boils down to something that you told me years ago. You said a large part of writing comics was knowing what to leave out. In this case, they left out the wrong things.*

GERRY: Well, we did what amounted to three drafts of that script, and at every stage, we said to Ralph, "Is there too much stuff here? Are you sure you want it to be two hours long? We can cut it — let's discuss how to cut it." Because you can at any stage — up to the time you start shooting — make screenplay changes that enhance the pace of the movie, provided you are judicious in what you cut, and how you make the transitions work, and how you set things up. If you cut out a set-up scene, you have to cut out the pay-off scene, or alter it. And *vice versa*. If you're not going to have the payoff, don't do the set-up. What Ralph did is what a lot of producers end up doing — shooting a movie before the script problems have been addressed, and then trying to correct the problems in the editing phase. You can't do it. It's impossible.

DAK: *Do you and Roy always work together as a team on screenplays?*

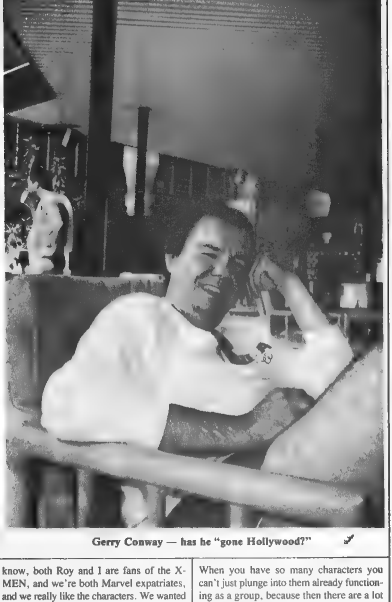
GERRY: Yeah, we're basically a writing team. That's how we're known — **Conway & Thomas, Thomas & Conway**. Roy and I had a deal that we were going to alternate our names on the screenplays, but on the first few that got produced, his name was first, which was absolutely fair because we did FIRE AND ICE because of Roy's relationship with Ralph, and in the other case, CONAN II, it was because of his relationship with **Ed Pressman**. In other films that we did, my name was first, but unfortunately, those films didn't get made! *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *What are you working on next?*

GERRY: We're doing a series for SHOWTIME called DOC DYNAMO, and we have another project in the wings when we've got that done.

DAK: *What's the X-MEN movie going to be like? Is it going to be live-action?*

GERRY: It's going to be live-action. You know, both Roy and I are fans of the X-MEN, and we're both Marvel expatriates, and we really like the characters. We wanted to write a screenplay that was complementary to what **Chris Claremont** and **John Byrne** and **Dave Cockrum** and **Paul Smith** and **John Romita, Jr.** have been doing the past ten years.



Gerry Conway — has he "gone Hollywood?"

DAK: *The X-MEN is a pretty complicated book, with all those characters. How do you reduce it to a movie?*

GERRY: Well, what we're doing is starting before the gathering of the new X-MEN. We're doing our own version of an origin story, trying to keep it thematically consistent with the Marvel origin, but introducing the X-MEN to the audience at the same time they're introduced to each other. When you have so many characters you can't just plunge into them already functioning as a group, because then there are a lot of hidden relationships that would confuse the audience if they came out in the course of a movie rather than being seen in the forming stages. So we're starting from before Square One, in effect, and involving them in an exciting origin tale.

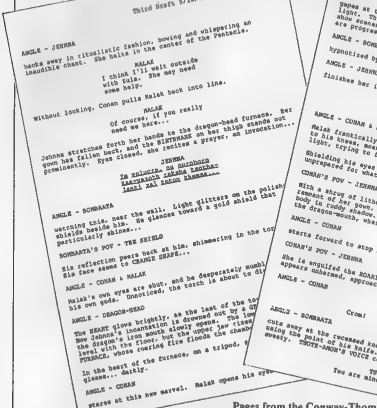
DAK: *Do you have a director and stars lined up?*

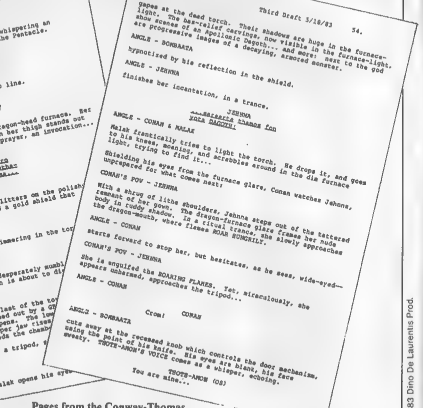
GERRY: They have people in mind, but it's very early.

DAK: *Does the West Coast office of Marvel have anything to do with it?*

GERRY: Not really. We've spoken to **Stan Lee** about it, and one of the producers is in

"For the X-MEN movie, Roy and I are


Third Draft 5/18/83
53.
ANGLE - JENNA
backs away in ritualistic fashion, bowing and whispering an inaudible chant. She halts in the center of the Pentacle.
RALAK
I think I'll wait outside with Nile. She may need some help.
Without looking, Conan pulls RALAK back into line.
RALAK
Of course, if you really need me her--!
Johnna stretches forth her hands to the dragon-head furnaces. Her voice has fallen back, and she recites a prayer, an invocation... prominently. Fyre closed.
JENNA
In Kalanda- an Nethbor
Lacrimosa Lerah Kanthar
Lelli Zal Adrah Khaeda...
ANGLE - BOMBARTA
wearing this, near the wall. Light glitters on the polish shields he holds. He glances toward a gold shield that particularly shines...
BOMBARTA'S POV - THE SHIELD
His reflection peers back at him, shimmering in the to His face seems to CHANGE SHAPE...
ANGLE - CONAN & RALAK
Ralak's own eyes are shut, and he desperately mumbl his own gods. Unnoticed, the torch is about to cl
ANGLE - DRAGON-HEAD
The EMANT glows brightly, as the last of the to Now Johnna's incantation slowly opens. The low the dragon's iron mouth and the upper chamber level with the roaring fire floods the chamber
SYRANCH!, whose cowled face is hidden by shadow.
In the heart of the fiercest flames, a figure stirs... darkly.
ANGLE - CONAN
stares at this new marvel. Ralak opens his eyes


Third Draft 5/18/83
54.
gapes at the dead torch. Their shadows are huge in the furnace-light. The shadow of Nile's carving, now visible in the furnace-light, shows a terrible image of a decaying, armored monster.
ANGLE - BOMBARTA
are progressive images of a decaying, armored monster. Near to the god
hypnotized by his reflection in the shield.
ANGLE - JENNA
finishes her incantation, in a trance.
JENNA
Sanabitur Omnes Ira
Quia Sanctus Omnes Ira
Ralak frantically tries to light the torch. He drops it, and goes to his knees, scrabbling around in the dim furnace light, trying to find it.
Shielding his eyes from the furnace glare, Conan watches Johnna, impressed by what comes next.
CONAN'S POV - JENNA
With a shrug of lithe shoulders, Johnna steps out of the tattered robe, now clear of her body. In a ritual trance, she slowly approaches the dragon-heads, where flames ROAR HUNGRILY.
ANGLE - CONAN
starts forward to stop her, but hesitates, as he sees, wide-eyed--
CONAN'S POV - JENNA
She is engulfed in the ROARING FLAMES. Yet, miraculously, she appears unharmed, approaches the tripod.
ANGLE - CONAN
CONAN
ANGLE - BOMBARTA
cute away at the recessed knob which controls the door mechanism, using the point of his knife. His eyes are black, his face sweaty. THOTH-AMON'S VOICE comes as a whisper, echoing.
THOTH-AMON (OS)
You are mine...

Pages from the Conway-Thomas screenplay for CONAN THE DESTROYER.

contact with **Jim Shooter** on the East Coast, so Marvel's being fully apprised of what's happening. It's like when you have children. Eventually the children have to grow up and go out on their own. When a movie is made out of your characters, there is very little you can do other than offer a lot of physical and emotional support. You can't really control the movie. DC was really unable to control the SUPERMAN movies or the BATMAN movie. You can offer advice but you can't really control it. The stakes in movies are so different than comic-book stakes, and the technical needs are so different. There are things that we know now as screenwriters that we never knew as comic writers. Which is not to say that comics people can't offer a lot of really good criticism and constructive advice. It's just that it's the movie people whose asses are on the line, not the comic-book people.

DAK: *How unlikely it would have seemed when Roy was doing the original X-MEN, that there should one day be an X-MEN movie.*

GERRY: Or that **Roy Thomas** and **Gerry Conway** would be writing it! *(Laughter.)* I think the more amazing thing is that comic-book people are actually involved in this film. The standard operations procedure is for the movie producers to hire people who are completely unfamiliar with the characters. I think the only reason Roy and I are involved at this stage is that in the minds of our associates out here in Movieland, we're not primarily comic-book writers — we're movie-writers who happen to have written comic books. Our comic-book expertise is simply a plus.

DAK: *Was writing comics for as long as the both of you did, good training ground for writing screenplays?*

GERRY: Oh, sure. Both media are very visual. You have to think in terms of visual confrontation — character confrontations played out through dramatic action. In comic books, all conflict is external and that really is what film is about, at least American film — externalized conflict. The other advantage that it gave us was that it prepared us to rethink our stories, and be flexible in our commitment to an individual story point or idea. I've written several hundred comic-book stories, and that means that I'm very flexible and very open to changing an idea, or coming up with a new idea or new point of view. And that's a real advantage. At one point, when we were working on the first script for CONAN II, **Pressman** had problems with some of the early story points that we had come up with, and he was very, very uptight to raise that issue with us. He wanted some changes but didn't know how, to go about bringing it up. I heard he was even thinking of hiring a couple of new writers to start from scratch. But we told him, "Ed, you've gotta realize that we're a couple of guys who come from comic books, where we do thirty or forty stories a year. We're not going to go crazy because we have to come up with a new story here." He was so relieved and so excited by that possibility that it really improved our relationship, and it really improved the first draft, to the point where, as I say, it's one of the great unproduced screenplays.

DAK: *You must keep a pretty rigid schedule in order to be doing all of this plus all the comics work you're doing.*

Opposite: Grace Jones, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sarah Douglas from CONAN THE DESTROYER.

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writing our own version of an origin story."

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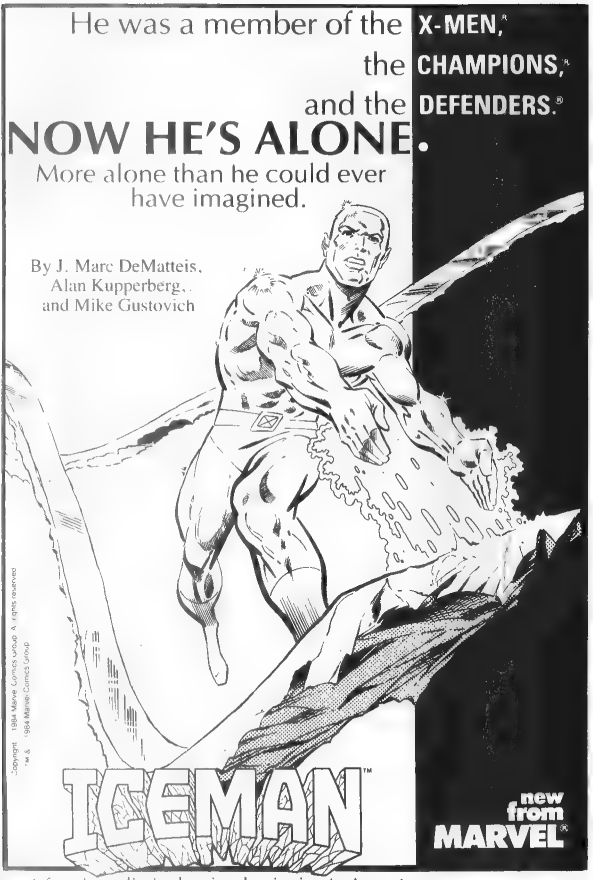
He was a member of the X-MEN,*
the CHAMPIONS,*
and the DEFENDERS.®
NOW HE'S ALONE.
More alone than he could ever have imagined.
By J. Marc DeMatteis, Alan Kupperberg, and Mike Gustovich
ICEMAN™
new from MARVEL®
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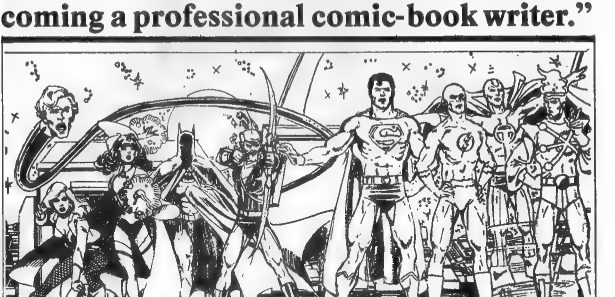
A four issue limited series, beginning in August.

"Jim Shooter was my inspiration for becoming a professional comic-book writer."



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George Perez art from the ill-fated JLA/AVENGERS team-up.

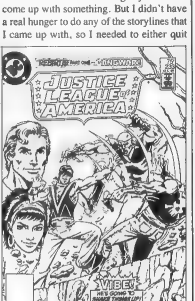
GERRY: Roy gets up at five-thirty every morning and goes running, then devotes the first half of the day to comic-book writing and the second half to film writing. I'm a little less structured but I tend to divide my time the same way. I find that when I'm writing a screenplay, my writing habits smooth out and I'm really producing more work overall, because I'm involved in something that I really enjoy doing, and it sort of re-excites me with regard to all my writing. Last year was one of the most productive years I've had in fifteen years of writing comics.

DAK: *But you have been cutting back on your comics work lately, haven't you?*

GERRY: In order to do the best work I can do, I had to cut back and try to regularize what I'm doing. I made the mistake of starting what amounted to three new series all at once — the SUN DEVILS series, ATARI FORCE and the new changes in the JLA. And since all three of those are group books, we're talking something like twenty-five to thirty characters that I had to deal with. And it was just getting out of hand. So I've cut back in my formal commitments, and I'm trying to concentrate more on the regular assignments and the regular production of books.

DAK: *You dropped FIRESTORM, right?*

GERRY: I dropped it as the full writer. I'm going to continue being the editor for several issues, and Carla, my wife, and I are going to be working on it together. She's finished a play recently and has had some more free time, and Dick has given me permission to use Carla or anyone I care to, as co-writer. To be honest, I felt a little burned out on the character. After all, I created him with **Al Milgrom** almost eight years ago, and off and on, I've been writing it for three years. After the climax of the major storyline and some of the sub-plots in the annual last summer, I found myself sort of flailing about for a direction in which to take the book. I've been beating my brains to come up with something. But I didn't have a real hunger to do any of the storylines that I came up with, so I needed to either quit the book, and be fair to the character and to myself, or come up with a way to do it with fresh input.



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DAK: *What about revamping the JLA?*

GERRY: That's a book I worked on for six years, and again, that was one I felt burned out on, during the last year I was working on it. And I had to say, "Look, take me off this — I have to get away from this for awhile!" And while I was away I kept getting pressure to go back on the book. We agreed that if I came back, we had to find some way to make the book exciting again, and fit it into the concept of DC continuity. We had had an absurd situation, particularly in the last year of the book, where major things are happening in the characters lives that are not reflected in the JLA. It was getting ridiculous. There was no sense of reality in the JLA, with regard to the DC Universe. It got to the point where there were so many different characters in the group, with different lives existing independently of the Justice League, that the Justice League could not depend upon itself — Batman goes off and forms his own group, Superman is off saving universes now and then, Flash is up on murder charges, the Atom is down in South America, Green Lantern is off in space, Green Arrow and Black Canary are constantly having lovers' fights — it got so where you could just not depend upon the characters to be there, or if they were there, to actually relate to each other because they have such different lives. So what we came up with was a storyline in which a major crisis occurs on Earth, and the most power-

THE FIRST CHOICE
WARP
E-MAN
B TEAM
JON SABLE FREELANCE
PREY!
AMERICAN FLAGG!
CANADIAN SUNSET!
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"The JLA/AVENGERS team-up could have been a very good book."

ful members of the Justice League are unavailable to assist, so Aquaman and the second-rank JLA members save the day, with the help of Martian Manhunter. At the end of it, Aquaman says, "This is absurd — we can't go on with this! We can't go on functioning as a team when we can't depend on each other!" So, as the only original member, he disbands the Justice League, by some obsure by-law in the JLA charter. He says, "I'll re-instate the League if each of you who rejoins agrees to function as a member of the League for one hundred percent of the time." And most of the members — when it's put to them that way — have to say, "Well, gee, we can't handle that." So the League is reduced to Aquaman, Elongated Man, Zatanna, and with Martian Manhunter re-joining, and four new members — the Vixen, Steel, a new character called Vibe, and another new character called Gypsy. And they get together in an extended story which runs for about four issues. It was originally supposed to be a four-issue mini-series.

DAK: *Do you have anything to say about the JLA/AVENGERS team-up, which apparently is destined never to appear?*

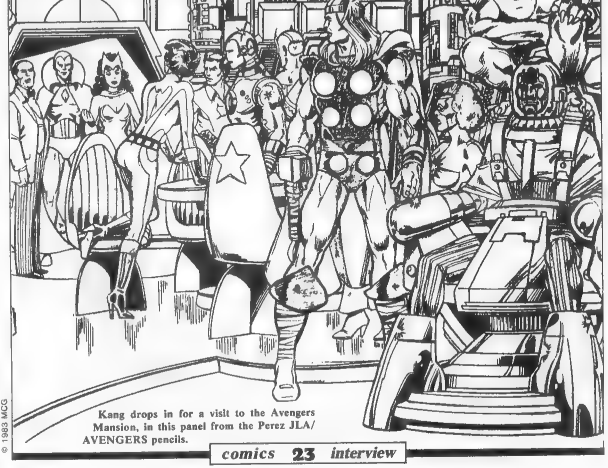
GERRY: Well, at no point, at any time after I turned in the first plot, did anybody ever tell me to my face what was going on. I found out from Roy what was going on. Dick in fact called me up to do one set of revisions and told me that they were things he wanted changed, and I found out later that they were actually things Marvel wanted changed. So, everything I've heard was second hand. I really have nothing to say. It just seems to me a darned shame, what happened. It could have been a very good book.

DAK: *You're still on ATARI FORCE, right?*

GERRY: Yes. I'm enjoying that very much.

DAK: *Keeping my ear to the ground, I keep hearing good little bits about that series from all quarters. It seems to be gathering popularity.*

GERRY: Yeah, I think it's a sleeper. I mean, TEEN TITANS didn't blast off until issue #7, in terms of their sales. We've been getting very good response in the mail. In fact, our mail has been phenomenal. Many of the comments we've received in the fan press have been very positive. Some



Kang drops in for a visit to the Avengers Mansion, in this panel from the Perez JLA/AVENGERS pencils.

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"I felt burned out on FIRESTORM."

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things that are done in comics bothér me, and the way that ATARI FORCE was handled is a major one.

DAK: *How so?*

GERRY: We brought it to Marketing and said, "Hey, can you promote the heck out of this? This is going to be an interesting book. We promise you that people are going to want to have this book as years go by — it's gonna be great." And they said, "Sure! And it's great that we've got ten months in advance to start promoting this!" They didn't do Fuck Shit! *(Laughter.)* The book came out and there was no poster, no advertising, no publicity in the comic fanzines, no convention promotion, nothing. ATARI FORCE was treated as a total bastard child of the company. I don't blame a lot of people for doing that, because the book was associated with Atari, which was a pariah at that point in Warner Communications. But they could've looked at what we were doing for DC and seen that it was really something special, and supported us a little. It was very painful at the time. I was very upset and hurt. Now, thank God, the readers seem to be picking up on the book and recognizing that we have something. But that's through no help of DC Marketing. They left us out there naked as newborn babes, for the wolves.

DAK: *Well, I've heard that you guys may be revamping the book.*

GERRY: We don't plan to change it. What we're planning to do is resolve the storyline that runs through the first twelve issues, then start a new storyline.

DAK: *What else are you working on at DC?*

GERRY: Well, we've got SUN DEVILS. There's another book that was left out there

like a newborn babe, with no promotion to speak of.

DAK: *I thought I saw a poster for that book.*

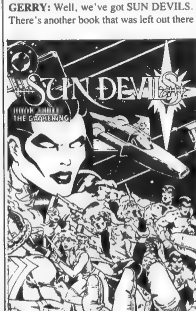
GERRY: Yeah, I think the poster came out the day the book went out on sale. That's at least better than the ATARI FORCE poster, which came out about a month after the book went on sale. Most of my complaints with DC — and I don't have very many — are business complaints — you know, complaints that the promotion that was promised on a book didn't get done, or the marketing that we expect doesn't get done. I don't mean to be talking about promotion as if that's the end-all, but I'm pretty pleased with the creative end of things at DC, and when you have something like these promotion fiascos occurring, you get kind of upset and bitter about it.

DAK: *What about the rumors I keep hearing about you going back to Marvel?*

GERRY: They're just rumors. I've got a contract negotiation that's been going on for five months between DC and **Mike Friedrich**, who's my agent, for me to sign another contract with them. It'll be a non-exclusive contract. I won't be obligated to work *only* for DC, but I do intend to work for DC. I have sent out proposals for new projects to a lot of places. One of the people at Marvel I spoke to was **Archie Goodwin**, and we discussed doing stuff for the Epic line. But I'm not planning on "converting." *(Laughter.)* I think it's better to do what you enjoy doing, and do it for whomever is willing to let you do it. I want to continue writing ATARI FORCE. I want to continue writing JUSTICE LEAGUE. I want to continue writing SUN DEVILS until the maxi-series is over. My heart is with DC. But I do want a non-exclusive contract with DC, so that if something came up that I could do with Marvel or Epic, I'd be free to do it.

DAK: *Anything concerning comics you want to get off your chest?*

GERRY: Listen, I've gone through lots of therapy, so I don't have that much I want to bitch about. *(Laughter.)* People tend to blame other people for disappointments in life. Life is disappointing sometimes. When your relationship with a company falls apart you start acting as a bitter spouse. I don't think that's productive. I don't blame anybody for feeling whatever they feel, but I don't have many negative feelings. I have lots of positive feelings. I think comics are going through a tremendous renaissance. What's exciting is that I feel like it's 1963 again. That's when both Marvel and DC were exploding with a whole bunch of titles. There was a feeling that anything could happen in those two universes. In the Marvel Universe, who knew that we were going to find Jane Foster and Thor breaking up? Who knew that Peter Parker and Gwen Stacy were going to have major traumas? Who knew that the Fantastic Four was going to break up and regroup, break up and regroup, break up and regroup? There was a feeling of possibilities. At DC you still had major changes in the works for Green Lantern, for Batman, for Superman — all kinds of possibilities. About ten years ago there was a crystallizing at both companies, which both companies are valiantly trying to break out of now, and I'm very happy about that. And at the new companies, it's back to Square Zero. There are untouched, unbesmirched universes yet to be formed



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Roy: "I missed CONAN. I like to think

and played in, and that's really exciting to me as a fan and a creator. You can come in without saying, "How does this fit into Kamandi's universe?'' or "How does this fit into the Multiverse at Marvel ?'' Who knows? Maybe it doesn't fit in at all, maybe it's something to do just because you want to do it. Everything doesn't have to be new, but the people have to care about what they're doing, and that's what's going on now — a lot more people are caring for what they're doing than was true twelve years ago.

DAK: *Is that what kept you in comics all these years?*

GERRY: Well, in comics, money is not that much of an issue for me any more, although I'd be really stretching people's credulity if I said I didn't like getting well paid and that the money wasn't important. What really is important to me is that when I was fifteen years old, I wanted to write comic books. I was reading comics during a tremendous period of growth and expansion and exploration, which was the first Marvel Silver Age — or whatever you want to call it — and which coincided with the **Julie Schwartz** Age at DC. I can't think of a better time to have been a comics fan, unless it's now. There was so much happening, and so many interesting characters, and so many talented people — **Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, Ditko, Carmine Infantino, Gardner Fox, Gil Kane** – all these marvelously talented people working in the field. Being a fan at that point was an incredible experience. For a long time — the first five or six years I was working in comics — comics people were my surrogate family. As time went on, and I became more mature, and started my own family — I met my wife, Carla, and we ended up having a kid — those ties to comics started to fray. But I realized that there were parts of me that still needed that relationship, that connection with my childhood. It has remained a part of my life that I don't want to leave — my childhood, my adolescence, my adulthood, and my middle adulthood, as it's turning out. It's part of my life and it's not something I ever want to break from. That's the emotional side. On the creative side, I feel that I'm going into a period of intense creativity in comics, and the psychic rush of working on material you enjoy working on is possibly even more intense in comics, because you're working with talented artists like **Jose Luis Garcia Lopez, Dan Jurgens** or whomever, who share that psychic rush, and you find yourself doing work you would not have thought yourself capable of doing. And that's an experience of joy. So I've got a lot to keep me here. And I have a lot more things I want to do

ROY THOMAS says...

DAK: *In what period in Conan's life does the new CONAN movie take place?*

ROY THOMAS: In the early part of his life. It really doesn't follow in particular anything in the books, except for one or two incidents here and there. **Dino de Laurentiis** didn't want any reference points to the first movie, or to the books, so it's a little different from what Gerry and I and **Pressman** and **Roger Donaldson** originally intended. I'll be sweet and not say anything more than that. There are things about the latest script that I like, but it moved away from what I had wanted the movie to be.

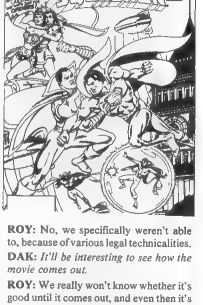
DAK: *What did you think of the first movie, CONAN THE BARBARIAN?*

ROY: I rather liked it. I didn't think it caught Conan very well, but it had some virtues. The first half of it I liked, but I didn't like the basic Moonie-type plot. I was story consultant and tried to get that dislike across to **John Milius**, the director, but he wasn't interested. He's the kind of guy who will hand you pages and say, "Here are the new pages I wrote. You're going to love'em." You can't deal with someone with that attitude. He's not really interested in anything but a yes-man. I wasn't a yes-man, and eventually he decided he knew enough about doing it and did it on his own. I think the second half of the film is bad because it really isn't a fantasy film. But I think he did a pretty good job on the first half. When he's on the right track, I think he's an excellent writer. I don't think he was on-target in this particular movie more than half the time. And I like **Schwarzenegger** as Conan.

DAK: *Didn't you do a script for it with Ed Summer?*

ROY: We did a treatment but none of it was used.

DAK: *I was wondering if you had used any of that in writing the new CONAN movie.*



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ROY: No, we specifically weren't able to, because of various legal technicalities.

DAK: *It'll be interesting to see how the movie comes out.*

ROY: We really won't know whether it's good until it comes out, and even then it's hard to dissect because there are so many other things — besides who actually wrote it — that can affect the final movie.

DAK: *Do you know whether they'll be making a third CONAN movie?*

ROY: I suppose it depends upon how the second one does.

DAK: *I was just curious if you would be writing the screenplay.*

ROY: We don't have any deal on that. I think it's rather unlikely, if **Dino de Laurentiis** is associated with it. We got along fine with Dino on a personal basis, but we just didn't agree with some of his views on Conan, and as much as I like Conan, I feel as if I'd rather go in other directions — although, if we were offered it, I'd have to seriously consider it, because

CONAN has missed me, a little bit."

we did have amicable relations with Dino and his organization.

DAK: *FIRE AND ICE was the first finished production where you've seen your script on the screen?*

ROY: We saw some of it. A lot of it fell on the cutting-room floor, including, unfortunately, a number of lines which were necessary to advance the plot and tell who one of the main characters — Darkwolf — is, and I think it suffers for it. Otherwise all the lines that are in there are basically ours.

DAK: *What about other screenplays you and Gerry wrote?*

ROY: Well, the first one we worked on — and also the first one we sold — was called SNOW FURY, based on a 1950s horror/science-fiction story. But it was never filmed. We did a second script with **Ralph Bakshi**, a live-action film called CAGE, for **Dan Melnick** at Fox, but he left Fox and therefore nothing's ever been done with it. We worked on a spy spoof which was originally supposed to be a MAD movie for Warner, but just as we were beginning to write the movie, they lost the rights to MAD and that screwed up everything — par for the course in Hollywood. That's the way things happen.

DAK: *Yeah, it sounds like every thing I've ever heard or read about Hollywood.*

ROY: It's everything that you ever heard — and worse. *(Laughter.)* I can only enjoy it all because I have another job. Sometimes I get a little depressed about things, about the inability of people to understand the simplest things and let a writer do his job. In the long run it's a medium where the director gets a disproportionate share of the credit in any event, no matter who writes the movie. The writer is hardly even mentioned in the reviews. It's just something you learn to expect in Hollywood. Our rate keeps going up, and as it is, we have several different projects in the works, so we can't really complain. We did quite well out of the CONAN movie and I hope it's a big success.

DAK: *Well, I guess you don't regret having cut loose from comics full time?*

ROY: Oh, no. One thing I never regretted was getting loose from comics full time! *(Laughter.)* Mentally, I cut loose from comics full time in 1974, anyway. When I left the editor-in-chief job at Marvel, even though I stayed around there for another couple of years, mentally I was gone. I'm probably more interested in comics now than I was then.

DAK: *Why?*

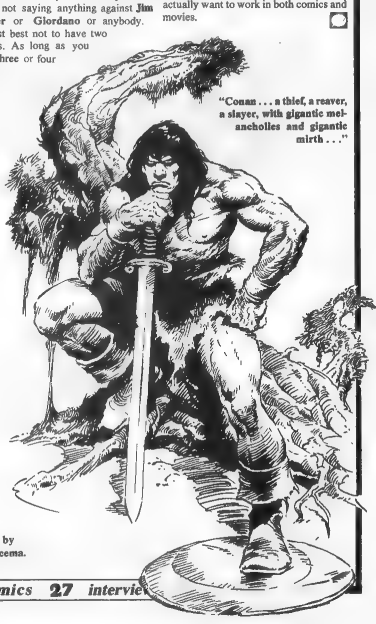
ROY: Because of the fact that I am working with DC. I'm able to work with the Justice Society and related characters, and do a story with Captain Marvel occasionally — the real Captain Marvel, instead of the various permutations of him that I helped develop myself, years ago — and that renewed some of my interest and made up for the fact that I missed working on the CONAN book. I like to think that CONAN has missed me too, a little bit.

DAK: *Well, it's good to hear things are working out for you.*

ROY: I'm happy not just because of my relative independence, but also I'm glad there are two or three other companies so people no longer have to choose between working for either Marvel or DC or leaving the field. I think it's great that that's not the only choice any more. That's not saying anything against **Jim Shooter** or **Giordano** or anybody. It's just best not to have two choices. As long as you have three or four choices it becomes a serious field. When it's a two-company field, it really can't be taken very seriously, on an adult level. I don't care for the middle range STAR WARS thing that has taken over the field. I can take a little of it but there's just so much of it, all on that same sophomoric level. I'd rather go off in my own direction — which doesn't bode well for my future in comics, but then I'm not worried about my future in comics. It'll either work out or not, as the case may be.

DAK: *With you doing film work, it must be nice not to have all your eggs in one basket.*

ROY: I like my work for DC, I like my work for Pacific, I wouldn't even say that I'd never work for Marvel again — but it's nice not to even have to worry about it. I actually want to work in both comics and movies.



"Conan . . . a thief, a reaver, a slayer, with gigantic melancholies and gigantic mirth . . ."

Art by Buscema.

© 1976 Magazine Management Co.

"I was appearing before more readers than

DON ROSA

To many of his admirers, Don Rosa is the best writer/artist in fandom today. His strips — which are now seeing professional publication as DON ROSA'S COMICS AND STORIES and the CAPTAIN KENTUCKY collection — follow the "comic high-adventure" trail blazed by Don's idol, Carl Barks. Don's protagonist, the unflappable Lance Pertwillaby, is thrust headlong into a world of black holes, treasure hunts, time trips, fresh-frozen Nazis, giant frog-puppets, and even Muhammad Ali. Don can satirize without pontificating, and be loquacious without seeming tediously talky. Best of all, he always makes the aim of his strips sheer entertainment, and more often than not (in this writer's opinion) hits the mark.

Don is also famous in fandom for more than his comic strips, however. For the last ten years, he has been — via his column "Information Center" — the repository of information on comics, movies and television that virtually everyone in fandom has turned to, at one time or another. He can draw upon a library of over twenty-thousand comics for verification of his witty and concise answers. I found Don just as witty and concise when we chatted recently . . .

LOU MOUGIN: *The movie RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK reminded me a lot of the adventures of Lance Pertwillaby. Do you think Spielberg was influenced by THE PERTWILLABY PAPERS?*

DON ROSA: Somebody has said that **Steven Spielberg** and/or **George Lucas** used to read ROCKET'S BLAST COMICOLLECTOR when I was doing PERTWILLABY for RBCC. So we'll probably never know if elements of my stories crept into that movie. Of course, they *are* **Barks** fans. **Spielberg** wrote the introduction to one of those big, expensive collections of **Barks** strips.

LOU: *You co-created PERTWILLABY about 1971, didn't you?*

DON: Yes, with a fellow student at the University of Kentucky, **Ron Weinberg**, who became an associate professor of

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Keno Don Hugo Rosa
Occupation: Part owner/operator of a construction company. Part-time writer/artist and columnist.
Born: 29 June 1951 — Louisville, Kentucky
Residence: Louisville
Credits: THE PERTWILLABY PAPERS, DON ROSA'S COMICS AND STORIES, CAPTAIN KENTUCKY, and the column "Information Center" for ROCKET'S BLAST COMIC COLLECTOR, THE COMIC READER, and THE COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE.
Favorite Comic: I guess my favorite single title would be UNCLE SCROOGE, but I don't really think I can pick one favorite single anything. I have favorite comics in each possible *genre* and I don't try to compare apples to oranges.

the best-selling issue of SPIDER-MAN."

Director of photography: Michael Coens. Special effects: Steve Durbin.

radiobiology and then went on to work for the Atomic Energy Commission. I wouldn't create a comic strip with just anybody.

LOU: *What was the origin of the strip?*

DON: I had become the editorial cartoonist of the KENTUCKY KERNEL, the college paper, back in 1969. I didn't know how rare a decent editorial cartoonist was at the time — they went nuts when I walked into the office. Even though I was their editorial cartoonist, I never got into politics that much. I've always considered doing political cartoons rather boring. At that time in college-life politics, I was rather moderate compared to the other people working on the paper, who were rather liberal. I was far more interested in cartooning than politics and I'd often illustrate ideas I didn't totally agree with. Pretty wishy-washy compared to the outspoken crank that I am today. But one time an anti-war protester sent an empty artillery shell — a bomb case — to his draft board as a protest, and although the paper supported him, I refused to do a cartoon defending the guy. I could just imagine some lady in the draft board mailroom unwrapping the thing and having a heart attack, which is nearly what happened. To me, it was like he had pulled a gun on somebody — that person would be put in fear of his life! In life, I'm less concerned with someone's politics and more concerned with whether or not they conduct themselves in a mature, responsible manner.

I *was* proud of the editorial cartoons I did. THE JOURNAL OF HIGHER EDUCATION did an article on the top five college newspaper editorial cartoonists in the country, and I was one of them.

But anyway, at the time when DOONESBURY was starting out, the editor said to me, "Maybe you can do something like DOONESBURY, with a regular cast of characters." He didn't have a clear idea of what kind of storyline he wanted, but I soon realized that what he did want was a gag strip, not the **Carl Barks** kind of adventure strip I wanted to do. But in those first pieces I set the strip on a college campus to give it a good excuse for being in a college newspaper, although I already had the entire "Lost in the Andes" story plotted out. As I recall, the editor didn't want that kind of strip. He wanted a political-satire/social-comment/all-that-kind-of-stuff strip

LOU: *And all extremely left wing.*

DON: Yeah. There was one strip — later reprinted in COLLECTOR'S DREAM — that the college newspaper never published. It's the one where Ron and I are sitting around and talking about the next adventure. They told me they didn't have room for it at the time. But I found out next September that they never intended to renew the strip for the next year. Being the "sensitive" cartoonist I was, I was just crushed. It really *hurt*. Unlike the political cartoons, I really loved drawing my daily comic strip. I don't especially like to *read* daily adventure strips, but I enjoy writing them. It's such a challenge to make them work. So I quit their dumb ol' newspaper, and went on with getting my degree in civil engineering . . . all of which I've forgotten.

LOU: *I don't think so. I've read your scientific strips.*

DON: Eventually, a new editor asked me to come back and do the strip again, and I did. I finally had my chance to do what I'd always intended — a comedy-adventure strip like **Carl Barks** used to do.

LOU: *Who did what on the first PERTWILLABY PAPERS strip? Did you and Ron co-plot it, or did he just script it?*

MEGATON MAN JOINS KITCHEN SINK LINE-UP!
IT'S GREAT BEING ON THE KITCHEN SINK TEAM!
SO! WHAT ARE YOUR SUPER-POWERS?
FIRST ISSUE IN SEPTEM
FULL COLOR
AXTER
©1984 WILL EISNER
©1984 FIELD ENTERPRISES, INC.
©'84 D. Simpson
DAVID SIMPSON '84
SO MUCH FOR A HOUSE STYLE!

"Fans have lost control of the hobby."

DON: This is going to sound like I'm conceited, but . . .

LOU: *Oh, go ahead.*

DON: He and I were great friends, and he was a great wit, but really, all he did was help with the dialogue. I'd come up with the situation and the plot and do all the drawing.

LOU: *Which one of you came up with the French athlete, Jacques La Strappe?* (Laughter.)

DON: I think Ron did. I'm not cutting Ron down, but I don't think that first period of the strip was that good. It's really not at all in the same spirit as all that I later did with the strip.

LOU: *I'll agree that "Lost in the Andes" was more like the first* real *Don Rosa, but I enjoyed that first period, too. It was a good start.*

DON: But there were things like tacky jokes about large mammary glands, which we probably felt we had to do to catch the college crowd's attention.

LOU: *Where did you get the characters — Feather, Dr. Smyte, Schuyler Roach — your regulars?*

DON: Well, I can't tell you I studied long and hard to develop those characters. Lance Pertwillaby is me, but I don't have that much hair anymore. *(Laughter.)* The only reason I started drawing myself was simply for the pleasure of seeing myself in a comic strip.

LOU: *We finally have an honest comic artist here!*

DON: The personality that I developed for Lance was a super-intellectual without a lick of common sense. Whereas Feather, his female companion, had no knowledge but *did* have common sense. Supposedly, these two would form a third personality — which would still be no match for Professor Smyte, the Doc Savage of Evil. Smyte was a Nazi war criminal. Nazis make such good villains. They're evil, and so good at it! For me, the ultimate villain has *got* to be a Nazi.

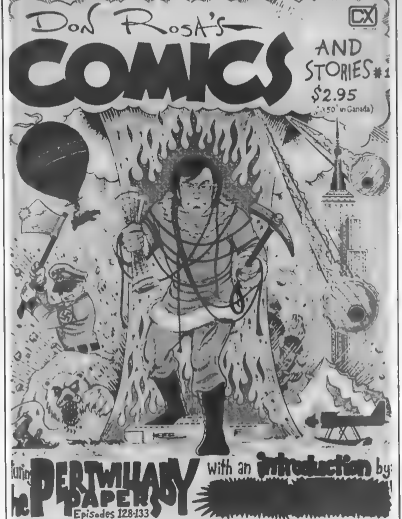
LOU: *Right, you can't use Commies any more.* (Laughter.)

DON: I based him on a professor in the chemistry department.

LOU: *Wow! Did the professor ever see the strip?*

DON: I don't know if *anybody* saw the strip. *(Laughter.)* I was just doing it for my own enjoyment. Actually, sometimes I would see people reading it in the cafeteria, and I would ask them what they thought of it. The response was generally, "Oh, sometimes I agree with it, and sometimes I don't." By this time it was an adventure strip — the "Lost in the Andes" storyline. One of my advisors on South America called me up and told me how he thought the different plot elements made a fabulous satire on the college financing committee. In order to have a logical reason for Professor Smyte going to the Peruvian Jungle, I had him in charge of a particular allotment of funds. That was my only reason — to get him on the trip. It wasn't satire. I learned early on that people will see anything they want to see in my strip — and, I guess, everything else.

LOU: *The title for that Peruvian story was really "Lost in (an Alternate Section of) the Andes," Did you get it from the Carl Barks story, "Lost in the Andes"?*



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DON: I needed a title the first time it was reprinted in ROCKET'S BLAST COMICOLLECTOR , and I settled on "Lost in (an Alternate Section of) the Andes" as an in-joke and as *hommage* to the **Barks** stories that I freely admit I draw from. Nowadays I usually just call it "Lost in the Andes" as in the original Donald Duck story. The plot elements come from a number of **Barks** strips and old movies like TREASURE OF THE INCAS, starring **Charlton Heston.** The thing that was most fun about THE PERTWILLABY PAPERS was the research. I decided to take a hint from the Old Master — **Barks** — and go for authenticity. I was right there at a college, and if there was anything I needed to know, there was an expert on the subject right on campus. I went to one college professor for the

"I hope readers will try something without super-

© 1983 Don Rosa

"Brother, that's action!" From DON ROSA'S COMICS AND STORIES #1.

South American details — what the natives would look like, how they would dress, and so on — and I consulted a geology professor to find out about every precious gem and mineral that could be found in South America or Polynesia. Remember the plane crash in the jungle? The plane was a 1949 Boeing Stratocruiser. I went through parts books and drew 1949 airplane parts to get it accurately.

LOU: *Yeah, I remember R. C. Harvey said that you knew where every bolt was placed in that old Stratocruiser.*

DON: I don't think I'm a good cartoonist, but I love doing the details.

LOU: *Why don't you think you're a good cartoonist?*

DON: My stuff is too cluttered to be appealing to the eye But I never worry about artistic layouts — I'm only interested in telling a story. I cram in as much plot and dialogue as possible on each page, and I always jam all the word balloons into the top of the panel to keep the drawings from being cluttered up. This is not "the Marvel Way to Draw Comics," but I don't care — I don't ever wanna' work for Marvel or any other comic company. I just do this as a hobby. I don't imitate any particular method of drawing comics — not even **Barks**, who simply *inspires* me more than most. If anyone likes my style, great. I've read articles or interviews with **Dave Sim** or **Mike Gilbert** or whomever, and they carry on page after page in a very scholarly manner about the way they lay out a page or work out complex psychological patterns for characters and so forth. I'm not at all ashamed to say just the opposite. Good or bad, right or wrong, I never think about what I'm drawing. I don't worry about the effect of the page as a whole, or how the dramatic lighting or use of black areas would affect the reader. Of course, in an individual panel, I'll consider what would be the most effective angle, but basically I just wanna' tell an entertaining story. I read the endless critiques of **Barks'** art and writing and I think to myself, "What bullshit!" The genius of **Barks** was that without even being aware of it, he was producing the most complex, authentic characters in the most entertaining stories, with the most perfect blend of comic-book art, writing, plotting, characterization, comedy and adventure in the history of the medium. Not like today, where every page of art and every line of dialogue is so painfully self-conscious of its purpose in making its creator another living legend and convention-guest. **Barks** did

heroes like RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK."

it best because he was simply trying to please himself.

LOU: *How did you get THE PERTWILLABY PAPERS into ROCKET'S BLAST COMICOLLECTOR?*

DON: When I got out of college in late 1973, **Ray Miller**, who had been doing the "Information Center" in RBCC, quit, and I took it over. I should admit it right here. I am *not* an expert on comic-book trivia — I don't have all this stuff in my head, anyway. The only reason I can answer all the questions that are sent in is because I've got one-stop shopping right here. I have a nearly exhaustive collection of most everything back to around 1948, so I can go back and look up the information in the actual comic books themselves. Or I can ask the *real* experts, like **Jerry Bails** and **Ray Miller.** The best part about doing "Information Center" is that it gives me a constant reason to go back into those boxes of comics, constantly keeping in touch with all the areas of my collection — the obscure horror comics, the westerns, everything. I was doing it until 1976, the year of that disastrous convention I put on.

LOU: *Was that Omnicon?*

DON: Yes. There's some convention in Florida using that name, and it has *no* connection with mine. I even have a copyright on the name, "Omnicon," and could sue those folks if I wanted to. But I would never do that. This is my hobby and I don't dirty my own nest. I'm not using the name anymore, so let them use it if they want. I still hear people in the street talking about how they enjoyed my Omnicon. It was an enormous success in all respects except that I lost money. It was like everything I do — I never intended to make a profit on it. Any large regional convention loses money the first year, but since I was the *only* sponsor, I couldn't afford to keep it going till it caught on. And I was doing Omnicon virtually singlehandedly. I had some very able help with the STAR TREK end of it — I billed it as a "fantasy convention" to include TV and movies as well as comics — and **Jim Van Hise** did the program book. Recently I saw some silly PRICE GUIDE TO STAR TREK COLECTIBLES which lists my Omnicon program as one of the two most valuable STAR TREK con programs, going for $20 or so. I still *give* them away, and I've got plenty.

But, getting back to THE PERTWILLABY PAPERS, after Omnicon I felt burned out, so I decided to do something completely different from "Information Center" and so I returned to THE PERTWILLABY PAPERS with the story "Sub-Zero," which is reprinted in the first issue of DON ROSA'S COMICS AND STORIES. Of course, all along I had been doing oddball spot illustrations for the "Information Center" to bring some visual excitement to all the dry indexes.

LOU: *Yeah, I remember my favorite one, a picture of Burt Lancaster and DeForest Kelley in GUNFIGHT AT THE OK CORRAL.*

DON: Which was based on the fact that **DeForest Kelley** played **Morgan Earp**, Wyatt's brother, in the movie.

LOU: *You've got Lancaster holding a gun and Kelley saying, "He's dead, Wyatt."* (Laughter.)

DON: After about two or three episodes of THE PERTWILLABY PAPERS, I went back to doing the "Information Center" again, due to "popular demand," and so I found myself doing both. But then I started writing it for RBCC the way I do it now for THE COMIC READER and THE COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE: I write the questions and answers up and send them in huge undigested lumps. TCR and CBG use as much of the material on hand as they wish to. I wonder if I'm not the first fan-writer to have a ghost writer, 'cause I don't write the opening and closing of my column very often. The editors provide openings and closings under my by-line.

The great thing about working for THE COMIC READER is that it's run by these two guys — **Mike Tiefenbacher** and **Jerry Sinkovec** — with such unspoiled, fannish enthusiasm, who *don't* specialize in writing hate articles or sueing somebody every month. THE COMIC READER still retains the same "purity of essence" we all had in this hobby fifteen or twenty years ago. Plus, they spoil me by how well they treat me — giving my columns cover-mention, running reprints of my CAPTAIN KENTUCKY strip, and so on. Quite different from how I felt my material was treated in CBG, which

Martin Bormann — alive?

Pertwillaby *versus* Nazis at the North Pole in DON ROSA'S COMICS AND STORIES #1.

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"The whole superhero idea is silly."

was like it was filler material, though that was simply the way things seem to work in that sort of publication. For the first six issues or so, **Mike Tiefenbacher** would add material to my answers without taking credit. I was embarrassed that he was perfectly willing to let me pass all this material off as my own.

LOU: *You finally altered the byline, didn't you?*

DON: Yes, so it would read, "By Don Rosa with additional material by **Mike Tiefenbacher**." I also started letting the "Information Center" be illustrated by other newcomers. It's funny — now I go to conventions and see guest artists who got their start illustrating a column I didn't have time to illustrate, operating my construction company and all.

LOU: *You mean Hilary Barta —*

DON: Yes, and **Mike Zeck.**

LOU: *What was the strangest "Information Center" request you ever received?*

DON: Someone once sent in a letter of 102 questions. And each question had several parts! He wanted to know the powers and origins of 102 characters. Like one question might be, "List the JLA with the power and origins of each member." I thought the letter was a gag. I sent the letter back to the guy. And the deal was, he didn't want to see this in print — he wanted me to answer it all by personal mail — just for him! Plus illustrations that he wanted me to draw, again just for him!

LOU: *He didn't include any payment?*

DON: Oh, no! Just stamps. And the morning after I sent his letter back, I got another letter from him, with *another* list of questions. *(Laughter.)*

LOU: *What's the most-often-asked question you receive?*

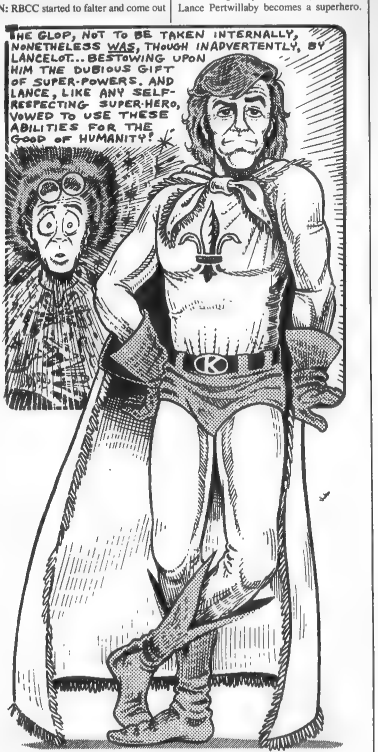
DON: "Give me a **Frank Miller** index." I get bored doing **Frank Miller** indexes. Next-often-asked question is, "Please update your **Frank Miller** index."

LOU: *Why don't you send those questions to Frank Miller?* (Laughter.)

DON: The toughest thing, you know, is not just whether I've got the answer — because there's probably someplace in my collection that I've got the answer to every possible question about comics. It's just knowing exactly where to go to find it. I'll have to sit down with a huge stack of comics and unbag and rebag issues until I locate the matter in question. Well, I knew the job was dangerous when I took it.

LOU: *The last PERTWILLABY PAPERS story you did before Lance became Captain Kentucky was, "Knightime," which you did two episodes of, and then RBCC folded. Are you going to complete "Knightime" some day?*

DON: RBCC started to falter and come out on an irregular basis, and an editor of our local newspaper wanted me to do a weekly comic strip for them. So, for those two reasons, I stopped doing "Knightime" and started doing "Captain Kentucky," in which Lance Pertwillaby becomes a superhero.


THE GLOP, NOT TO BE TAKEN INTERNALLY, NONETHELESS WAS, THOUGH INADVERTENTLY, BY LANCELOT... BESTOWING UPON HIM THE DUBIOUS GIFT OF SUPER-POWERS. AND LANCE, LIKE ANY SELF-RESPECTING SUPER-HERO, VOWED TO USE THESE ABILITIES FOR THE GOOD OF HUMANITY!

The secret behind Captain Kentucky's powers: "Octa-Hexa-Glop," radioactive industrial waste "Of unknown properties."

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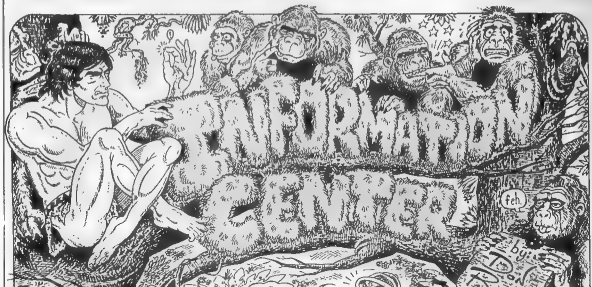


A logo for Don's "Information Center" column in the fanzine ROCKET'S BLAST COMICOLLECTOR.

Now I've gone back to "Knighttime" to complete it, and I've been able to work CAPTAIN KENTUCKY into the storyline. At the point where "Knighttime" left off, Lance and Feather were trying to figure out their plight and build a campfire and settle in for the night at Stonehenge. In the next episode — which I'm working on now, five years later — Lance wakes up the next day from a nightmare. Apparently, he dreamed all the CAPTAIN KENTUCKY stuff.

LOU: *Holy cow!* (Laughter.)

DON: "Knighttime" will be in the third issue of DON ROSA'S COMICS AND STORIES.

LOU: *Will you be continuing DON ROSA'S COMICS AND STORIES after issue #3, drawing new episodes?*

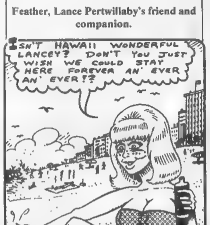
DON: If people buy enough of the first three issues, I just hope readers nowadays will be willing to try something that doesn't have superheroes in it, something that is like RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK or an old issue of UNCLE $CROOGE.

LOU: *When will the third issue be out?*

DON: Whenever I can complete it. I enjoy doing them, but now it's harder to find time. I'm married, I bought a house, have bunches of dogs, cockatoos, and tropical fish to take care of, and I have so many other interests, like computer adventure gaming, antique car collecting. Since I do this as a *hobby*, in my spare time, it's hard to do more than a page a week, working a few hours every other night. But I'm going to have to get down and get it done. You're keeping me from it right now. *(Laughter.)*

LOU: *Another thing I wanted to comment on is the hard science you brought to THE PERTWILLABY PAPERS. I was reading your explanation of black holes in "Vortex" — the story that's reprinted in issue #2 of DON ROSA'S COMICS AND STORIES — and it brought back fond memories of those Julie Schwartz DCs where every action got a paragraph of scientific explanation.*

Feather, Lance Pertwillaby's friend and companion.



DON: I like to make stories *sound* like they make sense. The most fun is not the drawing but the research and getting the plot to work out in a logical manner. In "Vortex" I had to find a way to sink a shaft directly to the center of the Earth, and figure out a way for it not to be hot or molten, so I came up with the idea for Omnisolvᵀᴹ, the universal solvent distilled in a black hole.

LOU: *How did CAPTAIN KENTUCKY evolve from THE PERTWILLABY PAPERS?*

DON: I was asked to do a comic strip by **Greg Johnson**, editor of SCENE, which is the Saturday Magazine Edition of the local paper, THE LOUISVILLE TIMES. I always rush to boast this isn't just some hick paper! The TIMES is more or less the evening edition of THE COURIER-JOURNAL, one of the five biggest newspapers in the country. Greg had been aware of my work for years, having seen article on me in the paper or my appearances on TV. When Greg told me he wanted me to do something for SCENE, I figured the obvious idea would be to utilize actual local personalities and places, and I finally decided to make the central character a superhero. I've always said I would never do a straight superhero strip. It's odd that I enjoy reading good superhero strips, but I could never bring myself to draw or write one. The whole "superhero" idea is just so *silly*! Frankly, I'll never understand why superhero comics are the biggest sellers. Why not more intelligent *genres* like detective or western or adventure? Comic books

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"Carl Barks produced the most perfect

are the only medium where there's this wild, unquenchable enthusiasm for these guys in bizarre costumes flying around doing incredible junk. When I consider doing that sort of thing myself, the whole idea sounds like a comedy. Now, a superhero comedy I can do, since it's such a natural combination to me. So I started doing CAPTAIN KENTUCKY for SCENE, and again I used Lance Pertwillaby as the hero since he and I have such an unlikely appearance or disposition to be a hero — glasses, skinny, out-of-shape. I just thought the whole opportunity was so *neat* — a comic strip published in one paper for one city using actual people and places in these wild, comedy situations! And such a large, Sunday-type, half-page strip, appearing prominently in such a major paper! I said to myself, "People are going to go wild over this thing!"

LOU: *Did they?*

DON: After the first couple of weeks I noticed I wasn't getting *any* reaction to the strip. And here I had a captive audience of a million people. Each week I was appearing before more readers than the best selling issue of SPIDER-MAN! But this was a totally different sort of audience than what I was used to. They wanted to look at a strip in a glance and understand it. They wanted chewing-gum for the eyes — that is, a strip like NANCY. The readers of RBCC would let me know what they liked or didn't like — I would get five to ten letters each about "Information Center" or THE PERTWILLABY PAPERS. Even when the fans didn't like something in my strips, I valued that kind of communication. But with CAPTAIN KENTUCKY, I felt I was doing all that work and dropping it into the garbage.

LOU: *Well, I recall at the end of the strip you reflected your despair at the lack of attention you were getting by taking some swipes at the sacred cows of the regular syndicates, such as NANCY and DENNIS THE MENACE and — dare I say it — GARFIELD.*

DON: I was just having fun and revenge at the same time.

LOU: *It's ironic that you were doing a strip about Louisville, a town heavily involved in boxing, liquor and horseracing — all of which you disapprove of.*

DON: I don't disapprove of horseracing, just maybe the gambling aspect of it. But let's not forget the big Kentucky tobacco industry! I'm passively against those other things, but I'm almost *militantly* against smoking. But I still love Louisville.

LOU: *I enjoyed seeing Muhammad Ali get creamed in CAPTAIN KENTUCKY, after DC let him beat Superman.* (Laughter.) *What was the genesis of that story?*

DON: That was just before my third year on the strip. I was trying to figure out how to get people interested in it. Captain Kentucky would go around, botch up feats of strength, get his costume torn off, and no matter what he'd do, no one in the strip would notice him. He was getting sick and tired of it, and I was getting sick and tired of the same situation in real life. I thought that after the hundredth episode, I'd start turning the strip in another direction and have CK become world famous — and maybe the plot would somehow affect real life and *my* situation. So I thought I would have him fight someone actually famous, like Louisville's **Muhammad Ali.** Now, as everybody knows, **Ali** is this grown man who made a living going around and physically beating the shit out of everybody — which is a barbaric idea. Completely obscene. But I had CK get the idea to fight **Ali** to make a name for himself.

LOU: *Do you know if Ali ever saw that particular episode?*

DON: I don't know, but he's bound to have heard about it since all his relatives live in Louisville. I would have found it hard to believe anyone could have objected to it. With all the actual people I have ever used as major characters, the only one I *intentionally* tried to insult was **Mayor Stansbury.** Like everyone else in Louisville, I was disgraced that we had a mayor so bad that **Johnny Carson** made jokes about him in his monologues.

LOU: *Who would you name as your artistic influences?*

DON: Some people compare my work to **Will Elder** or **Harvey Kurtzman**, but that's always puzzled me. When I think of **Elder**, I think of all the little gags in the background that have nothing to do with the strip itself. I've never tried to do that kind of thing. On the other hand, in most comics nowadays it seems like the idea is to stretch the plot over as many pages or issues as you can in order not to burn your ideas up too fast. But

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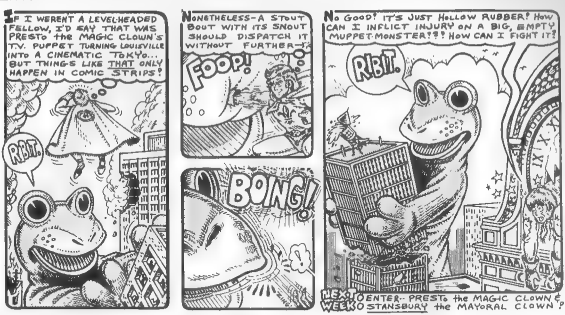
blend of art and writing in comic history."


IF I WEREN'T A LEVELHEADED FELLOW, I'D SAY THAT WAS PRESTO the MAGIC CLOWN'S TV. PUPPET TURNING LOUISVILLE INTO A CINEMATIC TOKYO... BUT THINGS LIKE THAT ONLY HAPPEN IN COMIC STRIPS!
RBBT.
NONETHELESS-A STOUT BOUT WITH ITS SNOUT SHOULD DISPATCH IT WITHOUT FURTHER-O
FOOP!
BONG!
NO GOOD? IT'S JUST HOLLOW RUBBER? HOW CAN I INFLICT INJURY ON A BIG, EMPTY MUPPET-MONSTER!?? HOW CAN I FIGHT IT?
RBBT.
NEXT TO ENTER- PRESTO the MAGIC CLOWN & WEEKO STANSBURY the MAYORAL CLOWN!

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A giant frog-puppet trashes Louisville — and Captain Kentucky flies to the rescue.

I do my damnedest to cram in as much as I can, and I never have enough room to get as much into the story as I wanted. I get carried away by the story. I'd love to hear from somebody else who my influences seem to be. I know I like **Carl Barks** and I like **Will Eisner**, but I've never sat down and studied the way they draw. I didn't learn to draw by copying, say, **Neal Adams** or **Jack Kirby**. That's a valid way to learn, but it's not what I did because I never had any ambition to go into comic books as a living. I wish I could get into another person's brain and see my artwork. I wonder if I'd like it. Now I don't see it as it is, but as I'd intended it to be. The best I can do is hold a finished page up to a mirror, so that it looks completely unfamiliar — like someone else drew it — and I can see where things might be out of proportion. I need to do something like that because I have trouble with proportions.

LOU: *Well, I'm not expert on cartooning, but I always found it a very well drawn strip.*

DON: I appreciate that. I'm quite proud of the overall result. But I don't know anything about anatomy. And I wonder if readers realize why my stories are set at the center of the earth, or at the North Pole, or the jungle, or ancient times. The main reason is that if I didn't set the story in some locale like that, I'd have to draw buildings and cars and all sorts of mechanical things, which I find very boring.

LOU: *Let's talk about your role as trivia expert #1 . . . not just comics trivia, but* anything.

DON: I used to think I was a "nostalgia" buff. I enjoy nostalgia as much as the next guy, but I finally realized that my interest in all these old movies and TV series and comics was their imaginative aspects. Those media forms were just more imaginative years ago, especially TV series. I've always said the Golden Years of Television were the Sixties. Sometimes I wonder if those shows and movies and comics were really as good as we think they are compared to what we have now. I might be fooling myself, but I think they *were* better.

LOU: *But people who are reading comics are probably a heck of a lot younger than us. They're encountering comics for the first time, and they may be having the same feelings about a current issue of FANTASTIC FOUR as I did when Jack Kirby was doing the book. I wonder, how valid is such criticism, when you've got such an age gap?*

DON: That's an interesting thought. You should have let *me* say that! *(Laughter.)* Last week I was talking to a younger collector, who was about seventeen, and he made the remark that he had a few "real old" comics in his collection — "real old" being late Sixties and early Seventies! He said, "They're not too bad for being so old." I think I almost struck him! They're right when they say new collectors have no sense of history.

MAN, DON'T MAKE ME MAD 'CAUSE ALI IS BAD! THEY CALL ME THE GREAT, BUT THEY GONNA CALL YOU THE LATE!
AAAAAT BIG TALK! BIG TALK! COME ON, COME AT ME, COME AT ME, COME—!!
POW!
CRASH!

© 1981 Kenó Don Rosa

"In science-fiction fandom — a group I have *no* respect for — there's this foul elitism."

LOU: *How many comics do you have in your collection?*

DON: You know, I never would answer that question in RBCC. It's something I don't like to get into because I never want people to think that because I spend so much time building my collection and searching out all these obscure old artists, or because I have a few more comics in my collection than they do, that my opinion or collection is one iota better than theirs! I notice that in science-fiction fandom — a group I have *no* respect for - there is this foul sense of elitism, a rampant corruption of idealistic values, where the members in their silly social structure thrive on feeling superior to one another. I'm so happy I've never seen that in comic collecting, possibly because it's a newer hobby and because we simply have another sort of corruption in comics collecting — a corruption of greed. But I don't want to ever introduce a spark of SF-fandom's social corruption into comics collecting.

That said, I guess there's no reason to stay away from the question, since I have friends who own more old comics than I do. Fortunately, I have this list I just pulled out of my desk which is a tally I've kept for the past seventeen years. As of today, I have 28,743 comics. But I'd like to add that there are collectors who have thirty or forty thousand more.

Lance Pertwillaby — prototype for Indiana Jones?

LOU: *Still, that's one hefty amount of comic books. How did you amass them all?*

DON: I started most of my collection back in 1968 before the *(dramatic pause)* PRICE GUIDE started coming out. I could go to a convention and buy old horror and science-fiction comics from all these obscure companies nobody ever heard of, like Atlas or Avon or Ace. I'd buy as many as I could carry — literally — from each dealer, for 40¢ or 50¢ each 'cause I was the only person who wanted 'em and these dealers were delighted to unload 'em on me. Some of them were excellent comics, some were terrible, but I bought everything. I've always been a pack-rat. I *did* specialize in certain artists like **Carl Barks**, but I never concentrated my collection in any certain areas. Well, actually, I guess there are areas I'm not into which *do* make up a large portion of the industry. I don't have any love comics or teen-humor. The only funny-animals I have are Dells, and the only war and western comics I have are DC or Atlas-Marvel. But I collected all the hero, adventure, science-fiction, fantasy and jungle comics. My collection goes back to the late Forties when I think the best comic artists were beginning.

LOU: *I noticed the dramatic pause in front of the PRICE GUIDE.*

DON: When I was buying comics thirteen years ago, we had boxes of "love" comics which nobody wanted at about 25¢ each. The reason those horror comics I bought in droves were so cheap was that most of them were recognized for the schlock they are.

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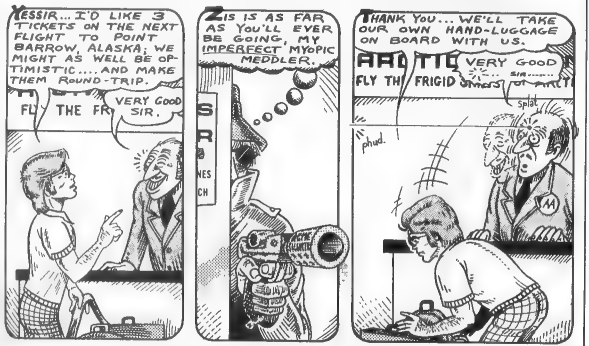
Lance begins a perilous journey to the North Pole in DON ROSA'S COMICS AND STORIES #1.


YESSIR... I'D LIKE 3 TICKETS ON THE NEXT FLIGHT TO POINT BARROW, ALASKA; WE MIGHT AS WELL BE OPTIMISTIC... AND MAKE THEM ROUND-TRIP.
VERY GOOD SIR.
THIS IS AS FAR AS YOU'LL EVER BE GOING, MY IMPERFECT MYOPIC MEDDLER.
THANK YOU... WE'LL TAKE OUR OWN HAND-LUGGAGE ON BOARD WITH US.
VERY GOOD SIR...
splat
phud.

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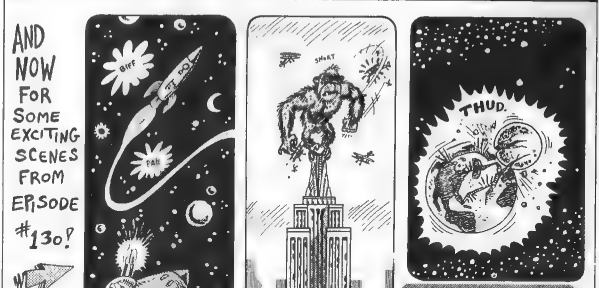
"The most fun is getting the plot to work."



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No.» after all these manipulative articles in the *(dramatic pause)* PRICE GUIDE. "love" comics are "good grl art" for about $50 each. Horror comics, no matter how lousy, are "injury to the eye motif" — fifty bucks a shot! What a crock!

What happened is that the fans lost control of the hobby. Fandom was once a jolly brotherhood and people collected old comics because they like 'em and the hobby and the prices were in control of the collector. But then came an annual "official" price guide and the weekly ad newspapers. So the hobby was placed in the hands of the dealers. Now the dealers could determine the price and condition because they could use the PRICE GUIDE as "proof." Then the dealers gleefully handed over the hobby to the speculators, so now you have people dealing in these old funny-books as mindlessly as they deal in gold. And here are the fans — people who actually *care* about the books — sitting on the sidelines helplessly watching this witless ping-pong match of escalating prices. The fact is that we're now living in a PRICE GUIDE generation of fans, and that's why the spirit of the original hobby is truly lost forever.

LOU: *What does your family think about you being one of the leading comics collectors of all time and a prominent artist?*

DON: They're pretty unimpressed. *(Laughter.)* Even after I've been doing this twenty years, my father can't imagine that anyone but a child would care about comics or *any* sort of fantasy. Apparently, comic strap art is like a language one learns over some period of time.

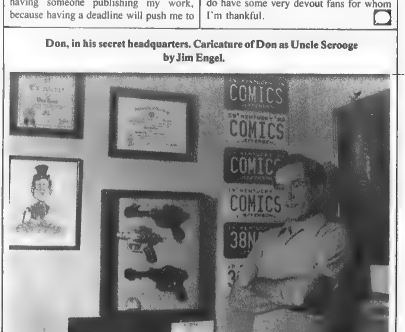
LOU: *Are there any last words you would like to say about your work?*

DON: I do a story to please myself — sort of self-entertainment or self-therapy. I don't try to make it saleable. I do the kind of strip I'd enjoy reading. If nobody else enjoys it, that's my tough luck. As much as I may sound like I talk down my own work, I'm damn *proud* of what I do. I'm proud of the gags and the intricacy of the plots. I love having someone publishing my work, because having a deadline will push me to keep producing and I love to hear from readers who enjoy my work. I do seem to have a type of cult following.

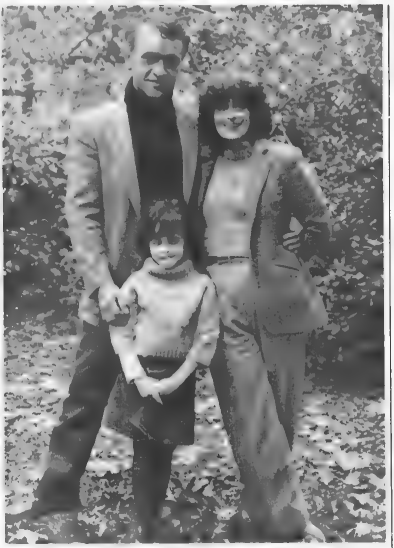
LOU: *One fellow writing for BUYER'S GUIDE went so far as to say that the three great geniuses of American comic art are Carl Barks, Will Eisner and Don Rosa!*

DON: Well, I thought that was off-the-wall enough to get us both locked up. But even though I have no delusions of grandeur, I do have some very devout fans for whom I'm thankful.

Don, in his secret headquarters. Caricature of Don as Uncle Scrooge by Jim Engel.



"I'm very fond of the hate mail I get."



Ernie with his wife and daughter.

ERNIE COLON

Although I don't remember meeting Ernie Colon for the first time, I recall very vividly the circumstances under which I began to get to know him. We were both working at DC as editors and, by happy circumstance, ended up sharing the same office. Ernie was the newly-appointed editor of GREEN LANTERN, THE FLASH, WONDER WOMAN, and a title whose editing we shared, NEW TALENT SHOWCASE. Ernie had actually been involved with NEW TALENT before me, working with its first editor, Marv Wolfman. It was a hectic time. By all rights, NEW TALENT SHOWCASE deserved at least a full-time editor, but there we were, both of us splitting our time between that title and the others on our editorial slate. Together, we worked with the novices that came to us — some very skilled and very disciplined, others with a modicum of talent but the overblown egos of seasoned professionals. That interesting but trying experience began forging a bond that continues to grow stronger between Ernie and myself.

Maybe it was his determination to improve the titles that he worked on, damn the traditions and preconceived notions of the "right" way to handle those titles. Maybe it was his quiet manner, combined with hard-nosed, opinionated ideas of what he felt. Maybe it was his gentle, amused laugh. Or his quiet cynicism, combined with an optimism that has survived the harsh realities of the comic-book business for thirty years. Maybe it was his love of art, of drawing. I'm sure it was all of those. But, even more, I respected his tendency to speak out when it wasn't necessarily "politic" to do so. To speak his mind in an industry notable for the number of people who sniff the air to see which way the wind is blowing before proffering an opinion.

I trekked from my West Side Manhattan apartment to Ernie's more spacious East Side abode in order to conduct the following interview. It was pouring rain that evening (with record flooding in nearby New Jersey). There seems to be some elemental law that — whenever I go to Ernie's — it rains. But once inside, the atmosphere was warm and open, beginning with shared Chinese food that Ernie had ordered up. His good-naturedness was echoed in his daughter, who between word games with her father, popped up from the table to provide beverages. After dinner, we retired to the more private back room, where I cajoled Ernie into talking about his current project . . .

— Roger Slifer

"A good editor is rare in this business."

ROGER SLIFER: *Tell us about your graphic novel, Ernie.*

ERNIE COLON: It's called THE MEDUSA CHAIN and it began as a science-fiction novella. I showed it to **Dick Giordano** about two years ago and it took him nine months to read it and ten months to get my contract.

ROGER: *Very punctual.* (Laughter.)

ERNIE: I'm sure that Dick had his problems with scheduling and whatever, but what happens is that an artist gets frustrated into an early grave. *(Laughter.)* But anyway, once he read it, he loved it. When I got the contract it was a very good contract and I was very happy with it.

ROGER: *Many people have complained that a lot of graphic novels haven't really been true "novels," in the literary sense of the term. I take it that this definitely has a story with a beginning, middle and end?*

ERNIE: Absolutely. My whole training is putting complete emphasis on the storyline. I don't care what it is — comedy, mystery, horror or science-fiction — to me the overriding thing that you give any reading audience is a story.

ROGER: *Besides drawing THE MEDUSA CHAIN, you also inked it, correct?*

ERNIE: I found myself taking on more and more responsibility because I really loved the project. So I dialogued it and pencilled and inked it. I wound up lettering it because I didn't want it to leave my hands. And now I'm coloring it. And I'm also a *de facto* editor. I took it all on.

ROGER: *That's great.*

ERNIE: But I'd like to clarify why I did all these things. I certainly have an ego but not big enough to imagine that I'm a better letterer than **John Costanza**, who I would have loved to have lettered it. But he was busy, and I didn't want to do my work around his schedule and break up the job. It would break the rhythm of what I was doing. My lettering is adequate — not great, but it certainly tells the story and it's not going to hurt anybody's eyeballs.

ROGER: *Was this the first comics writing you've ever done?*

ERNIE: Well, I wrote a lot of stories for RICHIE RICH and CASPER. I've written a lot of things for my own amusement. I don't consider myself a writer. I really am an artist who occasionally writes. I think that in order to be considered a writer, I should have paid bigger dues to writing. My dues have been paid to art. But I enjoy writing — as long as I don't *have* to do it. I think if someone told me, "Tomorrow morning, you have to start earning a living writing," I'd panic.

ROGER: *So you got involved in all the different aspects of the project in order to — I don't know if the right word is "control" but —*

Chon Adams, hero of Ernie's graphic novel, THE MEDUSA CHAIN.

ERNIE: Well, I think part of it is control. This goes back to RICHIE RICH where some terrible inkers — nice people but really terrible inkers — would ruin very tight pencils that I would hand in. Then at Marvel, when I drew CONAN, I did a very careful job on one of **Roy Thomas'** last stories, and they brought in **Ernie Chan**, who I don't know and who may be the most decent guy in the world, but who I consider one of the worst inkers in the business.

ROGER: *I think part of the problem is that editors don't necessarily choose compatible people. There are different styles suitable for different people, and sometimes the styles don't match up.*

ERNIE: Yeah, it's the schedule and who's available, and who isn't available, and so

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"Neal Adams has taken a lot of criticism be-

on and so forth. I understand the realities of life but I am not happy with them. So with THE MEDUSA CHAIN I wanted control for a change. I don't think that's a terrible thing. I'll make mistakes but, Number One, they'll be *my* mistakes and not someone else's, and, Number Two, I think I can minimize the mistakes. I'm not attempting to do everything perfect, but what I am trying to do is something that's my own. And that means a lot to me.

ROGER: *You mentioned to me that you had shown THE MEDUSA CHAIN to people like Marv Wolfman for their input. I think that even people in comics who are termed "writer/editors" — the best ones anyway — do make sure that they're getting feedback from other people.*

ERNIE: There's no question in my mind that all writers need editors, I don't care how brilliant they are. But what they really need is a *good* editor. And one of the rarities that you have in this business — and that's across-the-board, in any kind of publishing — is a good editor. I've had some editors that I liked and have gotten along with, but again, when they make a mistake it's *their* mistake and not mine. And I resent that. It's *my* project. Now I think that the trap some people have fallen into, when they're given the responsibility and the right to edit their own material, is that they take off one hat, and put on an imaginary hat, and say, "Okay, I'm an editor now." And that's not true, of course. What they do is compound their own fractures. They enlarge their own errors. If their tendency is toward verbosity, they become more verbose. I have only to mention the **Michael Cimino** film, HEAVEN'S GATE, as an example. He was given full control, and instead of getting some kind of input from others, he simply went along on his own and created a disaster. Well, I don't want to fall into that trap. I'm not so maniacal that I really think I'm my own editor. I'm not. Even if it says, "Edited by **Ernie Colon**," it's not true if it's my own material. What happens is that I go to people like **Todd Klein**, **Marv Wolfman**, or yourself — people whose opinions I respect. In fact, you made an observation about a relatively unimportant detail where my main character is grabbing a woman's arm and saying something, and you thought that this was a threatening gesture, when what he was saying wasn't threatening. And I took your advice. I removed that gesture.

ROGER: *You say that the story is science fiction. Science fiction covers a rather broad range. Can you get more specific?*

ERNIE: When I write a story I want the locale and the environment to be such that you can't really take the story and set it anywhere else. You can't write a story that takes place in the early 1900s in Boston and transpose that story to a western or a science-fiction setting. So to the extent that this story depends upon an advanced technology, yes, it is science fiction. It could not happen anywhere else, at any other time. On the other hand, the thing has so much to do with people and their problems and their relationships with each other, that in a sense it's more "space opera" than science fiction.

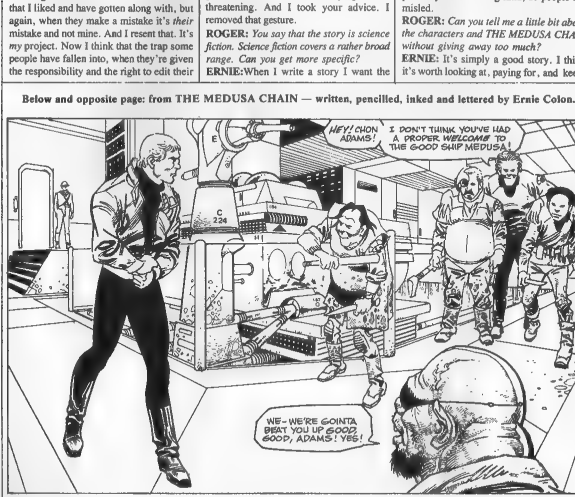
ROGER: *I want to clarify another point. Despite a publicity statement, this is definitely not a "locked-room" mystery, right?* (Laughter.)

ERNIE: **Mike Flynn** put out a blurb to that effect. But that was garbage. We had a little to-do over it. It was misinformation. It shouldn't have happened, but does all too often in this business. The fundamentals aren't taken care of. You either get no publicity or the wrong kind, so people are misled.

ROGER: *Can you tell me a little bit about the characters and THE MEDUSA CHAIN without giving away too much?*

ERNIE: It's simply a good story. I think it's worth looking at, paying for, and keep-

Below and opposite page: from THE MEDUSA CHAIN — written, pencilled, inked and lettered by Ernie Colon.


HEY! CHON ADAMS!
I DON'T THINK YOU'VE HAD A PROPER WELCOME TO THE GOOD SHIP MEDUSA!
WE-WE'RE GOINTA BEAT YOU UP GOOD GOOD, ADAMS! YES!

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cause people are so @!!?# envious of him."

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ing, and looking at again and again. It's a very dense story. There are a lot of subplots, a lot of characters, a lot of things going on. I wrote the story for fun. The interesting thing about stories and humor is that they're very fragile. I could sit here and tell you a story idea and say, "Wouldn't that be funny?" and you'd say, "Yeah, that's funny," but if we had to work on it for three months, it wouldn't be very funny any more. And yet if you want to maintain that freshness you'd have to work assiduously to maintain it, so that a person who had never heard the joke would say, "That's great! That's funny!" That's what happened with this story. When I first wrote it, it was really a story that I liked. It was fun writing. And I worked very hard for the past two years to maintain the freshness, which was first there when I wrote it and said to myself, "Gee, this is the kind of story that I loved to read when I was a kid!" And it's terribly difficult to maintain that freshness. After two years are gone you say, "Lord, I'm still workin' on this fuckin' thing!" *(Laughter.)*

ROGER: *Well, how do you retain that freshness?*

ERNIE: At great cost. *(Laughter.)*

ROGER: *How do you psyche yourself up?*

ERNIE: I honestly can't tell you. If you had asked me that question years ago, maybe I would have had an answer. I'm fifty-two years old now, I've been in this business almost thirty years, I've put out thousands of pages, and I can only say now that it's a magnificent obsession. You're going to sit at that desk, you're going to agonize over the work, you're going to hate it, you're going to say, "I wish I could do any fuckin' thing other than this! Why couldn't I be a dentist?" *(Laughter.)* And it's a mystery to me. There are times when I sit down and say, "I'm going to do *twenty-three* pages of ARAK?" — or whatever — "How the fuck am I going to get through this?" And when you get through it you say, "Ahh, that wasn't so bad. What's the next project?" *(Laughter.)*

ROGER: *Right. I think every creative person feels that. I know that as a writer you're faced with blank pages, and you've promised someone you're going to do something, and you have to make something out of nothing.*

ERNIE: I have to tell you, I'm a real admirer of a craftsman. A good carpenter, a good pottery maker — not people who are on the assembly line, but the people who craft things with their hands and their minds. As far as I'm concerned, all I've ever aspired to, in this business, is to be as good as an honest pottery maker. To me, that's a big thing.

ROGER: *You've mentioned to me that you couldn't articulate certain things in your artistic approach because it becomes automatic after awhile. One of the things that I've been thinking about lately is how much of the creative process becomes automatic. I've been working a little bit with a beginning writer and I've also worked with beginners with the NEW TALENT SHOWCASE, and it hadn't occurred to me how much I did automatically. In order to explain to someone what you're doing, you have to step back and put yourself in a different context. Have you found over the years that it becomes even* more *that way, that it becomes* more *automatic?*

ERNIE: Yes, that's true. It does become more automatic. That can work for you, and it can work against you. It can work against you in the sense that you become repetitive You take a bag of tricks that you learned earlier on when you were a freshman, and then you repeat that bag of tricks. When you're twenty-two and have a set of clever tricks, it's wonderful. When you're thirty-two, or forty-two, or fifty-two, it's not so clever any more. It's repetitive and boring. We all know writers and artists like that.

But, in another sense, it's wonderful. When I started to learn karate at age thirty-five, I already had had that zen experience of doing an action so many times that it becomes a reflex. When you reach that point, that's when you're supposed to do your best work, because you're no longer

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BACK IN THE SADDLE AGAIN!

AMERICAN FLAGG! No.15

written
and drawn by HOWARD CHAYKIN

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"You either get no publicity or the wrong kind."

thinking, "What's rule Number One? Do I indent this paragraph? Do I use quotations?"

ROGER: *Exactly.*

ERNIE: You're free and clear to be creative. If you can take advantage of this zen experience of repetitiveness, then you're really in a creative frame, where it comes out of you automatically, even mechanically. And that's where the sleepy part of your brain comes alive. You look at the page later and think, "How the fuck did I write that? Where did I get that from?"

ROGER: *Right, right.*

ERNIE: And that's a wonderful experience when you do that — a real zen experience. A teacher called Nikotiedes put out a wonderful book about drawing, and in one paragraph he summed up the teaching of anything creative. What he said is, "If you give someone a paint set, and they paint every day without fail, at the end of six months, you could not stop them from knowing how to paint." And that's true of everything else. If beginners would just say to themselves, "I am going to perform this action one hundred times," right away they're no longer mystified by the first few efforts. Because they know they're going to have to get to number ninety-nine! By the time you get to number sixty-five, it's no longer a mystery — no longer a big deal.

Conan, by Colon and Chan.

You're no longer flogging yourself to do it. You're looking forward to number ninety-nine. And you already know a lot of mechanics. And that's the only way to approach any creative effort. You're not going to do it once or twice. You're going to do it a thousand times. But start small, so that your mind can encompass it. "I am going to perform this action one hundred times. Let's see how I feel about it after a hundred times." And make no judgment until then — because at that point you have no right to make a judgment.

ROGER: *I think that you'd also agree that a complement to that is the fact that there are always new things to learn.*

ERNIE: Always. Even though I don't like rock music *per se*, I listen to rock music occasionally. I listen to classical stations and I switch from classical to rock, and I know what's current. It's not that I'm trying to keep myself young, but I'm trying to keep myself energetic and viable and creative, and I don't want to get stuck. I don't want to stagnate.

ROGER: *That's a characteristic, too, which I've also noted in people like Dick Giordano, and it's really the secret of not getting old. You have to keep aware and keep looking around you, and not close*

Colon and DeZuniga art from SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN #46, written by Roy Thomas.

THE AQUILONIANS HAVE SCARCELY FORMED THEMSELVES INTO A WALL OF SHIELDS WHEN, SUDDENLY FROM THE WOODS BEYOND THE SHALLOW CREEK--
PICTS!!
HEEEEEYAAAAA

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BLACK DIAMOND created by MIKE FRAMKOVICH, JR.
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The back-up strip is **COLT,** the voluptuous masked weapons mistress.

STORY: DON SCHLAGE
ART: SCHLAGE/GIORDANO

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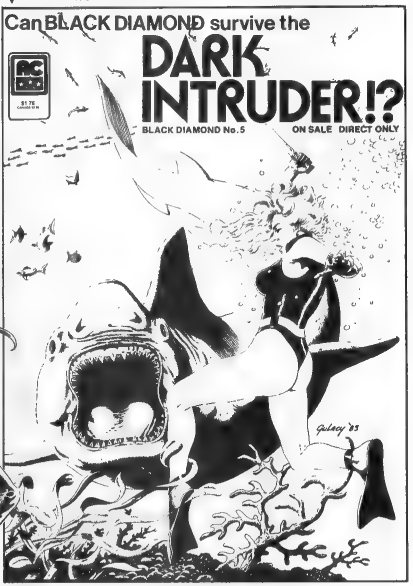

LOOK AT US NOW!

"Little by little ARAK got watered down."

yourself off to new art forms or cultural experiences.

ERNIE: Well, in art, you don't have to worry about looking old. You only have to worry about lookin' good. It's only in insurance that when you reach a certain age they fire you.

ROGER: *Going back to THE MEDUSA CHAIN, tell us about some of the characters.*

ERNIE: There's a guy named Chon Adams who has committed a crime. The book opens with his trial, and he's sentenced to a penal colony in outer space. The entire action of the book takes place on this transportation ship. The nature of this crime is revealed in the middle of the book, through flashbacks. Everyone on the entire ship, except for him, is a mutant, which makes life difficult for him — the only so-called "human being" on the ship.

ROGER: *Is he guilty of his crime?*

ERNIE: He's guilty, but in an interesting way.

ROGER: *Are you making any ethical or moral judgments about crime or the nature of punishment?*

ERNIE: I really don't think so. I leave that up to the reader. He commits a horrendous action because *he* feels he has no choice. When I show that sequence to people, they say, "Well, he could have done this," or, "He could have done that." And I say, "Well, that's what *you* say, but he acted on *his* judgment." So I haven't copped out. It's a very opinionated and very strong story and I think that it will create some controversy.

ROGER: *What's the captain like?*

ERNIE: She's also a mutant. She has a very interesting gift which she employs on Chon. Her forehead opens up like a sea valve and a black, shiny object protrudes, and with that she grips Chon Adams in kind of a psychological squeeze. She does this to him at the beginning of the book when, as a prisoner, he decides he wants to escape from the ship. That's how she stops him. It's real weird.

ROGER: *Was your approach to writing this different from the way you would do a twenty-two page story for a newsstand comic?*

ERNIE: I think each project is different. I really don't have a set pattern. When I look at a story, the story itself begins to dictate certain approaches. I think that's one of the reasons that my work is both very good and very bad. It's very good in the sense that I can shift from one style to another. The bad part of it is that I'm inconsistent. I think the one serious criticism that I would level at my own work is that jumping around from so many styles has impaired me and unfortunately, I have been very inconsistent. I'm a good drawer, but if I do, let's say, ten pages, there's bound to be a page in there that I'm not happy with, that I know I could have done better. But I have to let it go because that's the kind of business we're in.

ROGER: *You've also been known to destroy pages you don't like.*

ERNIE: Oh, I destroy them constantly. That's nothing. When I get back pages from DC, I destroy the ones that I'm really unhappy with, and the ones that look okay, I give away. I'm never that happy with work that I'm doing. It always looks out-dated, it always looks wrong, it always looks like I could have done it better. I can, quite literally, count on the fingers of both hands, the pages that I've kept, out of all the pages I've done in my life.

ROGER: *Can you give an example of some work you've kept?*

ERNIE: I kept an ARAK cover that had Death with a scythe cutting him down. But I've just become tired of it, so I'm looking to give that away. *(Laughter.)* It isn't looking as good to me as it did a year ago.

ROGER: *That's probably a good sign.*

ERNIE: That I actually kept it for a whole year?

ROGER: *Not only that, but people who do something and hold onto it and say they still like it after ten years, are showing that they haven't developed their skills very much.*

ERNIE: Maybe, maybe not. Take a guy like **Joe Kubert**, whom I admire so much. His work hasn't changed that much. But, by

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"I wrote a letter to Marvel saying:

God, what I see looks pretty good to me! *(Laughter.)* If I did a page like Joe, I wouldn't give it away!

ROGER: *You mentioned that you're very pleased with the contract on this book. There is a lot of interest these days in creators' rights. A lot of creators have managed to — shall we say — loosen up the companies a little bit more and retain a little more of their rights. What do you, as a creator, feel about these — I don't know, I hesitate to say "more equitable arrangements" because it sounds like I'm being judgmental already —*

ERNIE: First of all, I think it's important to be judgmental in certain aspects of creativity or life. You can't suspend your critical faculties just because people nowadays find some sort of onerous slant to being judgmental. You *have* to use your judgment. But I'm not the one who can tell you what's equitable and what isn't. Just as I couldn't tell what's usurious in the marketplace and what isn't. A guy who buys something at ten cents and sells it for a dollar thinks he's making a profit, but someone else says, "This is usurious. You only paid ten lousy cents for it! How can you make so much?" It's really what the market will bear. And it has very little to do with our criticism or our judgmental values. If, next week, God forbid, the comics industry falls down as it did in the early Fifties when I was looking for a job, and they have no use for the hundreds of artists who are now crowding each other in a very busy marketplace, you'll find that the market will dictate the terms, and the terms may be very harsh indeed. On the other hand, if the comics industry continues the way it's been going, artists will be able to demand more and more. Again, it's what the marketplace dictates. Right now artists are retaining a lot more rights. *I* think that they're equitable, because I think artists have been taken advantage of for so many years. Their creations have made millions for other people, and the artists have benefitted very little from it. In some instances, they've barely made a living. If you don't mind me being a little profound for a moment . . . *(Laughter.)*

ROGER: *Please do!*

ERNIE: I really found that one of the problems artists have is that they want to do the work desperately. You find that in very few other professions. Nobody *wants* to be a dentist. Nobody wants to look in people's mouths and scrape the tartar off their teeth! *(Laughter.)* But artists desperately want to work. And the business is run by people who don't have the slightest fuckin' notion of what makes an artist tick — all they know is that they see in front of them a sap who will do anything to work. So, of course, they rape and pillage the poor son of a bitch for years.

Let me say something here about **Neal Adams**. A lot of people say Neal is crazy, Neal is this, Neal is that. Well, **Neal Adams** is an unusual human being, extremely talented, whatever his faults — we've all got 'em — but on top of that, this guy has put his money where his mouth is every fucking time. He's put himself out, he's worked hard for people he doesn't even know, and it's people like Neal and **Jenette Kahn**, and a lot of others, who worked hard to get something we've all benefited from.

ROGER: *AMETHYST is the last ongoing comic series you were working on, and it's what people have probably associated you with the most over the last year or so. How did that come about?*

ERNIE: **Gary Cohn** and **Dan Mishkin** had the concept, and Gary wanted me as artist. He's one of those people who remembers work that I did ten years ago that *I* don't even remember. I was flattered by the fact that he specifically wanted me, and I thought the concept was a good one even though it had everything going against it. It starred

A costume design for AMETHYST — art by Ernie Colon.

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Help! I'm being held prisoner at Harvey!"

IT IS WHILE HE WREAKS HAVOC AMONG HIS STRANGE, FANATICAL ATTACKERS THAT HE SUDDENLY SMELLS --
SMOKE!
THE FALLEN LAMP, THEN, HAS CREATED A FIRE WHICH HAS TAKEN HOLD --
--AND WHICH THE FRENZIED CREWMEN IGNORE, IN THEIR FANATICAL DEVOTION TO THE CALL OF THE CONCH!

© 1981 Conan Properties, Inc

The two Ernies — Colon and Chan — illustrate a Roy Thomas script for SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN #66.

a female character, which doesn't sell; it was fantasy, which doesn't sell — all the commercial possibilities seemed to be against it. But it was challenging and interesting, and I love fantasy as much as I love science fiction, so I accepted the project. We had a lot of problems with it. We're a small Hollywood. The industry really is a peanut version of Hollywood, with all the accoutrements — the stars, the egos, the hassling behind the scenes . . .

ROGER: *Where are our homes in Bel Air? That's what I want to know!* (Laughter.)

ERNIE: I said it's a "peanut" version! It has its share of craziness, schedules that are barely met, and so forth. But in all, I think it was a very good project. I was very happy with the result, although I was not happy with certain details, particularly in my own work. I thought there were at least two issues which looked like I had fallen asleep on the job. The fact was that we were constantly late, and I was constantly making up time. I'm not putting that up as an excuse, but the material itself was so new to me, and the schedule so tight, that it was only later that I discovered that all the effort I had put into it was sheer muscle and not enough imagination. And the contrast is easily seen. There are some issues that jump out at you and sing, and others simply don't. But in all I think it came out fairly good.

ROGER: *Well, I think that in a twelve-issue run of almost anything, some episodes are more uneven than others, either because of the script or because of just the complications and, of course, working under these deadlines. As I understand it, the series was very commercially successful, to the surprise of some people, and now they're planning an ongoing series of AMETHYST . . .*

ERNIE: I think that's ill-advised. If it goes monthly, what was commercially against it will become more exaggerated and more complicated. It was something very special. I discussed this with **Karen Berger** and **Dick Giordano** today, because I think they're going to find that in order to make this a winning property for the readers, for the fans, it's got to be treated specially. It's got to be either another limited series, or a graphic novel. Even if it's a monthly, it's got to be special. If it's just another monthly, it's going to die very quickly. At this point, unless they do come up with

something special, I've already told them I'm not going to do it.

ROGER: *How did a little Puerto Rican boy named Ernie come to the USA and become a comics artist?*

ERNIE: I came here in 1940. I was almost ten years old. A few months later the ship I came on was sunk by a German U-boat. *(Laughter.)* I was pretty lucky. My folks were divorced. My mother got a tough time from her family because they were very old-fashioned Latins and she had to strike out on her own. We were poor, and often hungry. We didn't get any help either from her family or from my dad, who didn't know I existed until many years later when he suddenly got an attack of the fatherly love craperoo, which doesn't mean anything on that level.

I always drew, I always dreamed of being an artist. I gave up the dream, oddly enough, in my late teens, then tried to resurrect it a couple of years later, but Wertham had done his job and comics were in a total depression.

ROGER: *Why did you give up the dream?*

ERNIE: Because I didn't have the background of an artist. Nobody in my family was an artist, and I didn't know what an artist was. I had no contact with artists at all. So, essentially, I was in a vacuum. I was looking at people's work in books and comics, and trying to learn but, of course, it was very difficult — almost impossible. And I went to an art school — I went to Industrial Art which is now Art and Design, but they didn't teach me crap there. I walked out of there almost as ignorant as I was

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ALL THE QUESTIONS ASKED...
ALL THE ANSWERS FOUND.

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"DC's NEW TALENT SHOWCASE was a disaster."

when I went in. The only good thing that happened to me is that I met others who had the same ambition I had. But when I came out, the field was depressed, and I worked in factories as a messenger. I didn't get an art job until I was twenty-three.

ROGER: *And who was that for?*

ERNIE: That was for Harvey Publications, as a paste-up worker. I did paste-ups during the day, and at night I practiced drawing their characters. And I did that for a full year, and then they let me go freelance, drawing the characters. They thought I was good enough at that point.

ROGER: *How long were you at Harvey?*

ERNIE: Nearly twenty-five years.

ROGER: *Most people couldn't endure that!* (Laughter.)

ERNIE: I didn't think I could, either. And there were times when I thought I would hallucinate. Although twenty-five years sounds like a long time — and it is — I interspersed it with a lot of work for a lot of other people. I took a couple of years off, for example, and did a lot of film work.

ROGER: *Storyboarding?*

ERNIE: Storyboarding, designing film. Sometimes the storyboard was very tight, which meant that the film came out precisely as I had drawn it. Other times it was just an indication of where the film was going. Then I did some acting for three or four years, when I was about thirty — method acting.

ROGER: *Here in New York?*

ERNIE: Yeah. In fact, I was in the first travelling company that **Joseph Papp** set up, doing Shakespearian repertory in both Spanish and English. That was a lot of fun.

ROGER: *Why did you give it up?*

ERNIE: Because, although it was wonderful and exciting to be on stage, it was terrible seeing people go through auditions, seeing how they were treated. The whole business is so crazy and dehumanizing in many respects. Although I never went on auditions — I got all my jobs through word-of-mouth.

ROGER: *You must have been good.*

ERNIE: I was good. But I wouldn't take up that life. I was lucky. I was a cartoonist. I could draw. Other people went through soda-jerking — doing garbage stuff — while hoping to get an acting job. The competition was fierce. It's unbelievable.

ROGER: *Getting back to comics, do you have any noteworthy stories from your twenty-five years at Harvey?*

ERNIE: Oh, my Lord, give me fourteen hours for that! I think that maybe one of the reasons that I stayed there was that it was so interesting — so bizarre.

ROGER: *Just in case some people aren't aware of it, Harvey is — or was, until recently — a family-owned company. Three brothers owned the place and everyone was one big, happy family, right?*

ERNIE: Oh, yeah! *(Laughter.)* In fact, I wrote a paper about it and was advised by attorneys not to have it published. That was a tough paper. I compared the twins to **Cain** and **Abel**.

ROGER: *I thought there were three of them.*

ERNIE: There were, but the older brother died and the twins were left with the business. They just despised each other and fought constantly. They didn't talk to each other except to curse each other. It was really funny and terrible.

ROGER: *There are always rumors of a sale or an alleged sale. I know Marvel said that they had bought Harvey, and then that they hadn't bought it . . .*

ERNIE: I heard that Marvel wanted to buy it, but they saw the lay of the land and quickly and intelligently retreated from it. I heard that MCA, Filmways, and I-don't-know-how-many-others want to buy Harvey. The problem is that you can't come to terms with them and have them react in a rational way.

ROGER: *What made you finally depart from Harvey?*

ERNIE: As I said, I did leave several times to do other things and came back for a lot of reasons. Most of them were money. They paid very well. And every time I quit, my money went up almost geometrically. *(Laughter.)* The first time I quit they actually let me stay out for a year, at the end of which I got a call from them saying that they would double my salary. That felt good. I mean, I would have gone back for half-again what I was making. When I heard "double," I *ran* back. And then when I quit subsequently, they kept raising my salary. It was easy work for me, and it was work that I respected, even though I grew tired of the repetition. The writers there were top notch. **Lenny Herman**, who unfortunately died recently, was one of the finest humor writers in the country. You would have thought a guy like that would have been sitting pretty, but he wasn't terribly ambitious. He had

Colon art for Marvel's JOHN CARTER OF MARS #20.

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YES, QUIZ, THEY COULD BE TORTURING HER AT THIS MOMENT!
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"Little Lotta was a despicable character!"

no respect for money at all. An amazing individual who only wanted enough money to do the things he wanted to do, which were really rather modest. One of them was playing handball.

ROGER: *He didn't care whether he played handball in Bel Air or not?*

ERNIE: He didn't give a shit what wall he played against. He was a handball fanatic. He died doing exactly what he loved, which was playing handball.

ROGER: *So you worked on CASPER, and RICHIE RICH —*

ERNIE: I worked on all the characters at one point or another, but obviously RICHIE RICH and CASPER were the biggest names. They had a lot of other characters — BABY HUEY, although I didn't work on that extensively. I did everything else — HOT STUFF, LITTLE LOTTA, LITTLE DOT — the worst characters! They were obsessive! Little Dot had polka dots on everything, Little Lotta ate everything in sight, including the fuckin' furniture! *(Laughter.)* She was a despicable character.

ROGER: *Baby Huey was a lot more fun.*

ERNIE: He was a nice guy. And I love Richie. I thought Richie was a great character, and still is. Let me mention something that very few people know, or understand. I've said this to other comic-book professionals and they look at me thunderstruck, and then they dismiss it — RICHIE RICH is the biggest seller in comics history. No one has ever sold as many books under a single character's name. Just to give you an example, let's say, there are — what? — three Superman titles?

ROGER: *I think there have been five if you count ACTION and SUPERBOY.*

ERNIE: Right. Under Richie's own name there's RICHIE RICH, RICHIE RICH'S MILLIONS, BILLIONS, TRILLIONS, ZILLIONS, RICHIE RICH GEMS, and so on — all these titles, always with RICHIE RICH on top — and he sells thirty-three titles a month!

ROGER: *Wow!*

ERNIE: Those thirty-three titles sold in excess of twenty million copies a year. One character! I don't think anyone can match that record — not **Disney**, not anybody.

ROGER: *You worked for awhile at Seaboard/Atlas, which was owned by Martin Goodman —*

ERNIE: There's nothing I can say about that. *(Laughter.)*

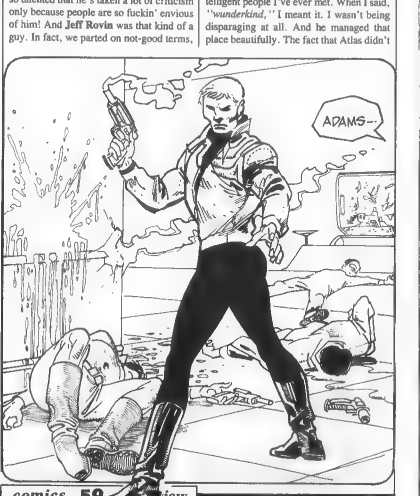
ROGER: *You don't remember how you happened to be there? Tell us the truth, Ernie.*

ERNIE: I was called by **Jeff Rovin** who, at that time, qualified as a *wunderkind*. I think he was about twenty-one and was made Managing Editor.

Chon Adams strikes again in THE MEDUSA CHAIN.

ROGER: *People always wonder why.*

ERNIE: People will badmouth a person in direct proportion to how smart or talented that person is. **Neal Adams** is that way. He's so talented that he's taken a lot of criticism only because people are so fuckin' envious of him! And **Jeff Rovin** was that kind of a guy. In fact, we parted on not-good terms, but I can't begin to tell you how intelligent he is and how peculiarly talented he is. To this day I don't think the man has found himself, but he was twenty-one years old and one of the most knowledgeable and intelligent people I've ever met. When I said, "*wunderkind*," I meant it. I wasn't being disparaging at all. And he managed that place beautifully. The fact that Atlas didn't



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YOURS COULD BE ONE OF THEM

UNITED FEDERATION OF
FEMALE FREEDOM FIGHTERS

"Better to Face the Bullets Than
Die Slowly of Boredom at Home"

A MARVEL GRAPHIC NOVEL

STARSTRUCK™

BY ELAINE LEE
& MICHAEL WM. KALUTA

ON SALE IN SEPTEMBER

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"My work is both very good and very bad."

work out was not **Jeff Rovin**'s fault at all. **Martin Goodman** put **Chip Goodman** in charge, and there was complete mismanagement, complete incompetence, to the point where they would dream up a super-hero and say, "Okay, let's go with it," and then, before the sales report would come out, they'd cancel it. They'd call you up at midnight and say, "You know that thing you've been working on for three days non-stop? Well, we're not going to do it!" You'd throw your pencil up in the air — even though you'd get paid for it. The frustration was enormous.

ROGER: *You have any idea why that was? The Goodmans used to own Marvel — which obviously was quite successful.*

ERNIE: Well, I have no idea what the **Goodmans** were doing with Marvel. Maybe the senior **Goodman** was the brains, which is what I suspect. If the people they hired had been let alone, I think we would have had another viable comic-book company with some good characters.

ROGER: *Atlas had a lot of great people.*

ERNIE: Chaykin, Neal Adams — all those guys were working for them, and doing great work. How could a place like that fail, except through the idiocy of mismanagement?

ROGER: *You worked on, I believe, THE GRIM GHOST?*

ERNIE: You're a pain in the ass.

ROGER: *I'm gonna pursue this, Ernie, until you tell us all.*

ERNIE: God, I should never have signed those things! Why did I do that? *(Laughter.)*

ROGER: *Actually, that was the first time I had seen your super-hero work, and I remember at the time finding it quite intriguing, because it didn't look like anyone else's.*

ERNIE: Yeah, here I am putting a work down that was the reason I got AMETHYST in the first place. I just remembered that the reason **Gary Cohn** wanted me for AMETHYST was that he remembered my GRIM GHOST. So why am I putting it down?

ROGER: *I'm trying to remember who was writing that.*

ERNIE: I don't remember, either.

ROGER: *Gee . . . I hope* he's *getting work, whoever he was.* (Laughter.) *Anyway, did you stop working for them when they went out of business, or before?*

ERNIE: I think that I stopped before they went out of business, but not long before. I went back to Harvey for a period, but then I went to Marvel.

At right: Colon art for "Love Witch and the Battle of the Living Dead," a Marv Wolfman story in Skywald's NIGHTMARE #6.

"The fans take care of themselves. They

ROGER: *How did that come about?*

ERNIE: I sent a letter to **John Romita, Sr.**, who was Art Director. I think I sent him a drawing of Casper, and then a series of super-hero type things. And in the letter I said, "Help! I'm being held prisoner at Harvey! Get me out of here before I go stark-staring." And they loved the letter and passed it around and called me up and said, "Come on down." They liked my art and gave me work immediately. They treated me well. A couple of projects didn't work out as well as they could have. BATTLESTAR GALACTICA to this day remains one of the thorns in my side!

ROGER: *I didn't even remember you did that one.*

ERNIE: I'm sorry I mentioned it. *(Laughter.)* It was doomed from the start. Universal didn't give us any cooperation so that I didn't get proper photographs. It was a very secret project. So I didn't know what the characters or the spaceships looked like. They said, "Don't make it look like the characters because their contracts don't cover it." So I did white guys where there should have been black guys, so they colored them tan. When a couple of fans — I wish I could remember their names — heard that I was having problems — they built models for me. They got them from the black market or something. So I was able to get some of the stuff right. The problem then was re-doing some of the stuff I had already got wrong.

ROGER: *How long were you at Marvel?*

ERNIE: Less than a year. I forget at what point I quit. Nothing overt. I simply moved on.

ROGER: *Is that when you started working for DC, or did you go back to Harvey and have them double your salary again?* (Laughter.)

ERNIE: They might have!

ROGER: *Was ARAK the first thing you did at DC?*

ERNIE: Yeah. What happened is that **Roy Thomas** switched from Marvel to DC, and he wanted me to come with him, because he liked the CONAN stuff that I did. He said, "Send **Dick Giordano** photocopies of your work." And I said, "Yeah, sure." He kept calling me once a week from California saying, "Have you sent the photocopies yet?" "No, not yet." So without telling me he sent some photocopies to him, and I got a call from Dick who said, "We love it and we'd like you to work for us." So I got my job at DC through **Roy Thomas**, which was nice.

ARAK started off with great promise. I thought it was a great concept — an American Indian in **Charlemagne's** court! — but little by little it got watered down and it became something it shouldn't have. Arak became a very mundane character. He should have been kept in feathers that shouted "American Indian!" at you whenever you saw him. Just like when you see Superman, for Christ's sake, you see him in his cape and his uniform. You don't see him flying through the air in a tuxedo, unless you're making a point. Arak didn't stand out anymore. He was a green dot against a forest. He should have been a red dot against green. So, gradually, I lost interest. I had other offers — AMETHYST, for example, and an editorship at DC.

ROGER: *Yeah, I wanted to talk a little bit about your editorial work at DC. You've been doing that about a year, and you were editing GREEN LANTERN, THE FLASH . . . what else?*

ERNIE: WONDER WOMAN, for a very short time, but I don't even consider that I edited it. I inherited all the scripts and all the artwork. I did **ARION** for awhile, and that was a bad experience.

ROGER: *Let's talk about the good experiences.*

ERNIE: The good experience was that I asked for the wimpy-selling titles — GREEN LANTERN and FLASH, very poor sellers — and after I had some input into them, they really gained in sales. Since then they've gone down, not nearly to where they were before, but much lower. **Cary Bates** and I got along beautifully. I figured out a concept that really made THE FLASH jump — which was to have him kill someone, accidentally, have him convicted of crime and have him serve time in jail. At first Cary thought I was nuts. *(Laughter.)* But then he began to see that it could really breathe life into the character. I had done some research and found out the last time The Flash had had a resurgence in sales was when Iris, his wife, died. This is what it needed — great emotional impact. And it worked. We got a lot of letters — great mail. I'm very fond of hate mail, and some of the hate mail I got I loved. In other words, we got fans involved in this thing. There was controversy! People were telling us we were crazy! And I loved all that, because it meant they were buying the damn book!

The same thing happened to GREEN LANTERN, to a slightly lesser extent. Because with GREEN LANTERN I was

"RICHIE RICH is the biggest seller in comics history." Ernie Colon pencils for RICHIE RICH'S FORTUNES #7.

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know what they like. I respect that."

forced to take on artists who were under contract, but who I didn't want, and I was also forced to take scripts I didn't want. The sales on that weren't as impressive, but still they were higher. And then **Jan Duursema** and I got into a hassle. I felt that she was being imperious and very demanding in areas that were not important. So again I took myself off that book. She hasn't talked to me since. I don't see the point in that. It was business — nothing against her. I always say, "Hello" to her, and she says, "Hello" to me with icicles hanging from it. *(Laughter.)*

ROGER: *Any last words of wisdom to the fans?*

ERNIE: The fans take care of themselves very well. They know what they like, and they go out and get it. I respect that very much. I think if we understood that a little bit more as professionals we wouldn't agonize as much over what the hell we're doing. We have *readers* out there. I don't like the term "fan" very much.

ROGER: *Any words of wisdom to aspiring artists?*

ERNIE: Yeah. I think DC's NEW TALENT SHOWCASE was a disaster. If someone really wants to draw comics, no one is going to stop them. If you've got the stuff, you're going to do it. And if you haven't, there isn't any showcase or school that's going to give you the stuff to get in. In comics, more than any other field, either you've got it or you don't.

And I think if professionals just took care of business, the problems wouldn't be so staggering. There wouldn't be so much agony.

ROGER: *In what sense?*

ERNIE: There's a lot of agony about sitting on projects too long. I'm saying this to management. People deserve a Yes or No, real quick, so they can go on to other projects. The whole idea is getting stories out to the readers. Let's get 'em out! Stop jerking writers and artists around! That's it. You got it.

"THE MEDUSA CHAIN is a very strong story that will create some controversy." Art by Ernie Colon.

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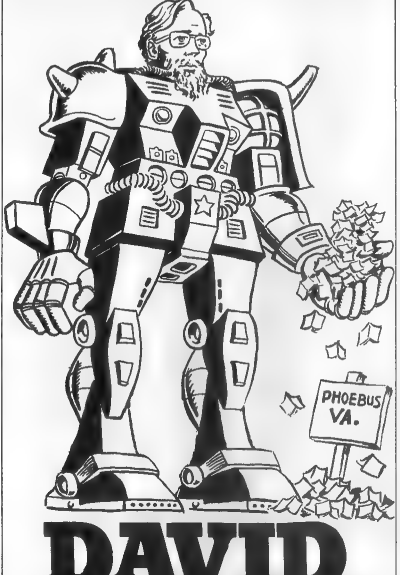
"Marvel's putting out too many reprints.



Art: Mike Cody

DAVID WEAVER

As our regular readers know, COMICS INTERVIEW covers the whole comics scene — from writers and artists to letterers, colorists, editors and publishers. Considering the "shake-outs" the comics field has seen in the past year, we felt it high time to talk to one of the front-liners and see what's happening today right where they're sold — in the shops. Brian Talley visited his local outpost of four-color fantasy (Benders of Phoebus, Virginia) and spoke to owner and educator-turned-retailer David Weaver, to find out "what's hot and what's not" on the wire racks . . .

BRIAN TALLEY: *What got you interested in operating a comic shop?*

DAVID WEAVER: I always liked comic books, and five years ago, when this shop became available, I worked out a deal with the fella that used to have it.

BRIAN: *How long did he own it before you took over?*

DAVID: Twenty-five years. There's been a bookstore here for close to one hundred years.

BRIAN: *Was the store comic-related in any way before you bought it?*

DAVID: They sold newsstand comics, but not many.

BRIAN: *How large a percentage of your business is comics?*

DAVID: Thirty percent.

BRIAN: *And the average age of your comics customers?*

DAVID: In the late teens. We also get a lot of people in the military; people in their thirties and forties. The audience for comics is getting older.

BRIAN: *Do you get many children — say, kids under twelve?*

DAVID: We have a lot. Since we are a general purpose newsstand/card shop, we have small children come in with their parents, and we get grade school children.

BRIAN: *Any reservations about selling certain comics to the younger ones?*

DAVID: I will point out to a parent what the content of a comic is, if I don't feel right about selling it. I will tell them if the book is too violent or too adult-oriented. I always try to keep some Disney or Warner cartoon books in stock.

BRIAN: *Have you ever speculated and been caught with a lot of copies of something that you thought would sell well, but didn't?*

DAVID: Well, I try not to speculate, but I have a large pile of INDIANA JONES #1 left. I figured that with good artists (**Byrne** and **Austin**), and being a follow-up to the movie, which I really enjoyed, that it would be a sure seller. It wasn't.

BRIAN: *What are your best and worst sellers?*

DAVID: Our best sellers are all the X-

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: David Weaver
Occupation: Entrepreneur
Birthdate: 9 August 1951 – Natick, Massachusetts
Residence: Phoebus, Virginia
Favorite Composers: Beethoven, Charles Ives
Favorite Classical Piece: Beethoven's Ninth Symphony

They're biting the hand that feeds them."

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"If someone asks me for something good to read, I will show them AMERICAN FLAGG or JON SABLE."

MEN related titles, and NEW TEEN TITANS from DC. Some of the worst sellers are the Archie-related titles.

BRIAN: *Have the sales on DAREDEVIL dropped much since Frank Miller left the book?*

DAVID: It dropped about twenty-five percent — not as much as I expected.

BRIAN: *What about the independents?*

DAVID: Most have fairly good sales. We have good sales on AMERICAN FLAGG, JON SABLE. The Comico group does not sell well. CAPTAIN VICTORY was a fair seller. It sold to Kirby fans. We sell a lot of the Japanese animation comics such as ASTRO BOY, CAPTAIN HARLOCK, and BATTLESHIP YAMATO. They are very good sellers, and they are very beautifully done. I don't know if you've seen them, Brian, but they are high-quality books with beautiful art.

BRIAN: *Do you see any of these companies giving Marvel or DC a run for their money in the next couple of years?*

DAVID: I don't think they will, but they are producing good, quality books, and I will promote them. If someone asks me, for something good to read, I'll will show them AMERICAN FLAGG or JON SABLE, or some of the others.

BRIAN: *Do fanzines move well? I know COMICS INTERVIEW must, because I have a hard time getting a copy!*

DAVID: We sell out of COMICS INTERVIEW. COMICS SCENE, which recently went out of business, was a very nice product. NEMO is quite enjoyable and a good seller, as is THE COMICS JOURNAL.

BRIAN: *Even though people complain that it's too negative?*

DAVID: Well, people seem to enjoy it. I don't read it as much as I used to because of the negativity, but I do enjoy the interviews.

BRIAN: *What about the more expensive products, such as the graphic novels? Do they move, or are people more hesitant to buy them because of the higher price tag?*

DAVID: No, they move very well. I mentioned the Japanese products — they sell for eight or nine dollars a book, and they sell well. The EC Libraries are also steady sellers.

BRIAN: *Does having taught elementary school kids and having a psych degree help in dealing with comic fans?* (Laughter.)

DAVID: Well, I've always liked kids, so that helps in selling to them!

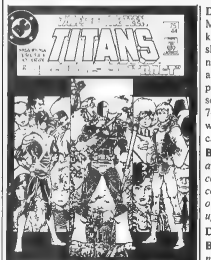
BRIAN: *What do you — as a fan — enjoy reading, and what's in your collection?*

DAVID: LIL' ABNER has always been my favorite. I read most of the newsstand comics. Right now I'm collecting some of the early DCs. I also like the undergrounds — I have a large collection of them.

BRIAN: *Do the undergrounds sell well?*

DAVID: I don't sell the undergrounds much through here. I have a separate mail

"We sell out of COMICS INTERVIEW."



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On this page, some of the best-sellers at David's comics shop.

order business for that. I find that I don't want the kids buying them, so I don't have them out on the rack.

BRIAN: *Whose work do you admire, undergrounds and mainstreams?*

DAVID: In the undergrounds, I like **Robert Crumb, Dan O'Neill** and **Kim Deitch.** For the mainstreams, I like **Will Eisner, Carl Barks, John Byrne, Howie Chaykin**'s work for First Comics, liked **Dan Spiegle**'s work on BLACKHAWK, and I liked DAREDEVIL when **Frank Miller** was doing it. I also enjoy RONIN.

BRIAN: *Do you have much back-issue business?*

DAVID: About half as much as new issues

BRIAN: *Do you do much convention business?*

DAVID: I go to the local ones. I don't like to travel, so I go to the ones in the Norfolk and Richmond area, but not much beyond that. I used to, but I found that the business I lose by not being in the shop doesn't make it worthwhile.

BRIAN: *Being owner, what is the biggest problem that you face?*

DAVID: Just having to keep on top of so many different things. Being a diversified shop, there's always something. Summer is a busy comic time, the fall and winter is busy with greeting cards, and books during Christmas. It always presents something coming up next. There is no slack period.

BRIAN: *Is there a big enough market to support continued growth among comic shops?*

DAVID: It seems to me that there is. More people are getting into comics. I know that up in Richmond, there was one shop with a pull list of 150 people, and now there are three shops in the same area, and they are each pulling for 150 people. If a shop offers a subscription service, people will not have to go to the 7-11s, and they will be introduced to a wider range of comics than the 7-11s can carry.

BRIAN: *I find that the stores like 7-11 and the drugstores just don't care about comics. You can look on a rack and find comics six months old. It seems that the only purpose that comics serve is to take up floor space.*

DAVID: That's right.

BRIAN: *If Jim Shooter walked in right now and said "Dave, what can I do to make things in the industry better?", what would you say?*

DAVID: One thing which **Shooter** has done that's important is that he has gotten the titles out without reprint issues. DC seems to be having trouble in that area right now. But I do think that Marvel is putting out too many "Special Edition Reprints."

BRIAN: *Is there a market for those books?*

DAVID: They do sell, but I don't think publishing them is a good idea, because it's hurting back-issue sales, which is dependent on the specialty shops, so I think they're biting the hand that feeds them.

BRIAN: *Do you carry anything special that some shops don't?*

DAVID: I carry a stock of comic-strip books, such as SCORCHY SMITH, TERRY AND THE PIRATES, LITTLE

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NEMO, **Segar**'s POPEYE, WASH TUBS, and POGO. I have a wider range of interests than some of the people who just collect DC and Marvel.

BRIAN: *What is one of the faults that you find in comics today?*

DAVID: I don't like all the continued stories. The soap-opera elements do not appeal to me.

BRIAN: *So you would rather see a book with ten pages of fighting?* (Laughter.)

DAVID: No, not so much that, but I would like a book that you could pick up and not have to have read the previous five issues to enjoy.

BRIAN: *Will a movie or a TV show about a character help sales on that character's book?*

DAVID: Yes — the G.I. JOE comic, for instance. We have always had good sales on it, because they have the nice TV commercials.

BRIAN: *Would you like to see, say, an X-MEN or TEEN TITANS commercial done along the same lines as the G.I. Joe ad?*

DAVID: I think that it would help them. Maybe even run them with Saturday cartoons, and publicize the fact that these books are available.

BRIAN: *What kind of future do you see for the industry?*

DAVID: I like the diverse subject matter that is appearing in comics now. ECLIPSE MONTHLY, for example has a western strip and a **Sax Rohmer** story. I'm hoping other people besides the super-hero customers will catch up on some of these and expand the base of comics buying.

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Foreword by Jules Feiffer
Introduction by Rick Marschall
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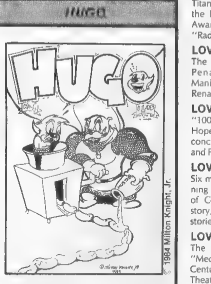

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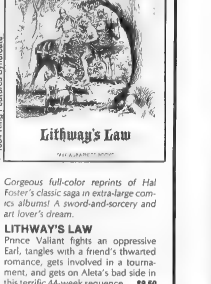

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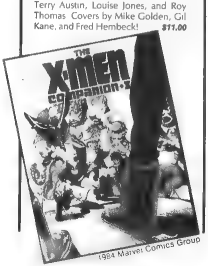

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"I started off reading DC because Marvel

Kelly Nichols in her brief blonde-bombshell period.

Unless you have a fondness for Blue Movies, the name Kelly Nichols probably won't mean much to you. But, in the relatively brief span of about three years, she has emerged as one of XXX-rated films' hottest leading ladies (in more ways than one), a fact born out by the Adult Film Association bestowing on her their Best Actress Award for her in the Blue Movie IN LOVE, a film that was widely released in non-porn theaters and garnered respectable reviews.

One would scarcely expect a woman as beautiful and sensual as Kelly Nichols to be a former high-school nerd and tomboy, much less a comics fan or an ardent reader of science fiction and horror. Kelly does not, however, fit the stereotype of what the general public might expect a porno actress to be like; her zest for life and her many varied interests are too great to allow her to be pigeonholed.

Kelly and I met during the making of a film on which we both worked, she before the cameras — I, behind the scenes. She and her husband, Dick Howard, an adult film actor who also plays in a rock band, threw a party on the last night of shooting, and they graciously invited me. During the party, I got a chance to talk at great length to Kelly, and the conversation drifted, quite naturally, to comics and science fiction. And as we talked, the germ of a devilish idea formed in my brain: Why not, I thought, interview Kelly Nichols for COMICS INTERVIEW?

So I approached DAK with the idea, knowing his taste for the bizarre and outrageous. Dave gave me the go-ahead for the interview and also asked me to write up my impressions of what Kelly Nichols is really like.

It's a pleasure to report that she is one of the warmest, nicest people I've met in the Big Apple. Listening to Kelly as she eagerly discussed Spock, Kong, VAMPIRELLA and Virgil Finlay, I couldn't help but be charmed by her enormous enthusiasm for pop culture. In this increasingly conservative era we live in, some may wonder at the inclusion of a porno star interview in a magazine devoted to comics, but to those doubting Thomases, I offer Kelly Nichols as living proof that comics fans come in all shapes, sizes, and job descriptions . . .

LYMAN RAND: *Kelly, what is your main interest?*

KELLY NICHOLS: My *main* interest? Ai-yi-yi . . .

LYMAN: *I mean, of the subjects we're here to discuss — comics and pulps.*

KELLY: Well, my first interest was in the old pulp magazines. My father had two large boxes of pulps from the late 1940s and 1950s — AMAZING, FANTASTIC, ANALOG — in mint condition, that he had saved as a boy. When I was about eight, my five brothers and I used to take them into our rooms and read them for hours on end. The boys grabbed them because it was their first glimpse of those large, milky-white female protuberances. I got into them because I thought the art was fantastic. I loved the erotic covers and the drawings. One of the reasons I liked VAMPIRELLA so much was the art — just fantastic. That started my interest in becoming an artist of some sort.

LYMAN: *Which of the old pulp artists did you like?*

KELLY: The only one who stayed in my mind was **Virgil Finlay**, because I liked his particular scratchboard style and the stippling that he did. I didn't retain the other artists' names at that point — I was more into the actual stories. That's where I discovered **Heinlein** and **Lester Del Rey** and —

LYMAN: *Edgar Rice Burroughs?*

KELLY: Oh, luckily my mom had an incredible collection of **Burroughs**. We're not just talking TARZAN, but all the science-fiction stuff — the Mars books, the Moon books — she had the entire collection. In hardbound, too.

LYMAN: *Probably the original editions.*

KELLY: I'm sure they were, because they were breaking apart. My mom had been encouraging me to read, but up to that point all I read were labels off things. But then after I got hooked on science fiction, it got

was going through a 'dingo' period."

KELLY NICHOLS

to the point where I would go to the library and my stomach would actually hurt because I couldn't check out all the books I wanted to check out. It was a positive thing to center on. It increased my vocabulary until I had the highest vocabulary throughout grade school and high school. In high school I was very alienated from my peer group — the only girl, and kind of a tomboy — and this love of mine just helped the alienation along. But my mom encouraged my science-fiction reading, although she wasn't too keen on the way we put dad's collection — a fortune in pulp magazines — in our club house behind the garage. We didn't sufficiently cover them, and they got rained on. Stupid us, we didn't learn our lesson. Within two years, we'd built up a collection of DC and Marvel comics and done the same thing. We had a big collection too, because my brothers and I were saving our milk money and buying comics like there was no tomorrow.

LYMAN: *Were you into the Marvel superheroes of the period?*

KELLY: I started off with DC because at that time Marvel was going through a kind of "dingo" period. I mean, they didn't know quite what to do with Captain America, and they were introducing heroes who were killed off right away because they weren't selling. But then, all of a sudden, the SILVER SURFER came out and I went nuts over it! I saw that, and went out of my way to buy more Marvel than DC. Those old **Jack Kirby-Stan Lee** issues had more to offer.

I met **Stan Lee** once, by the way. He was at this party, and he kept on saying, "I want to talk about your interest in comics and in being an artist." I didn't believe him, so I called later and found he really was from Marvel TV.

LYMAN: *Did you draw your own comics when you were a kid?*

KELLY: Oh, yes. I was a real doodler. It was one of the things that helped me get through grade school. I was frustrated with the parochial school I went to — I didn't like the nuns, and they didn't like me. I'd read a comic or a science-fiction book and look like I was working, or else I'd just draw and doodle. Many times I'd get a test handed back to me with a low grade because I was doodling on the edge of the test paper.

I was also a real Trekkie. My first Hollywood crush was on **Leonard Nimoy**, which then got transferred to Captain Kirk. My girlfriend — who was in love with Mr. Spock — and I would write whole stories about STAR TREK. I wrote one that was nine hundred pages — count 'em, nine hundred pages! We would illustrate them, too. I would say there was a lot of subliminated sex in there.

LYMAN: *There's a whole sub-culture in STAR TREK fandom — the Spockies — who are into the whole Kirk-Spock homo-erotic relationship. They've got Spock and Kirk as lovers.*

KELLY: Oh, yeah! I never took it to that point, but I know what you're talking about, in a peripheral way, because I used to get off when Spock — this very removed man — would show emotion when his best friend, Jim Kirk, was in danger. All of a sudden he would break out of himself and go: *"Jim!"*

LYMAN: *Did you go to many STAR TREK cons?*

KELLY: Only one. It was kind of fun. It's fun to discover someone else who has seen the programs over and over, as I have, to the point where I can mouth all the words as I'm watching re-runs.

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Kelly Nichols
Occupation: Actress
Born: June 1956, West Covina, Toyota, California
Residence: New York City
Credits: IN LOVE, GAMES WOMEN PLAY, DEATHMASK, MODEL BEHAVIOR, ROOMMATES, CATSPAW, TOOLBOX MURDERS, CHEERLEADERS' WET T-SHIRT CONTEST, etc.
Favorite Comics: Marvel's SILVER SURFER with art by Buscema, CREEPY, EERIE, and VAMPIRELLA.
Favorite President: Pat Paulsen
Pet Peeve: Bigotry on any level

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"My first interest was in the old pulp magazines. I loved the erotic covers and drawings."

LYMAN: *There's a woman, Kay Parker, who's now doing adult films, and she was in a STAR TREK episode. I don't know which one, but I'd love to track it down.*

KELLY: No kidding! I know Kay. She probably did a walk-on.

LYMAN: *Have you gone to many comic-book conventions?*

KELLY: I hate them.

LYMAN: *Why?*

KELLY: They're rip-offs. They generally charge too much, both for entry and for what they're selling. They're generally only worthwhile if there's some special function that you want to go to, like a dress-up night where, like in L.A., they would give prizes starting at $5,000, so it was worth it to go because when that much money is at stake people put a lot of time and thought into their costumes. Or if there's a guest speaker you want to see.

LYMAN: *Would you like to act in a science-fiction or super-hero film some time?*

KELLY: You throw a good script at me and I'd take it. Like STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND, or **Heinlein's** new book, FRIDAY. I would love to play the role of Friday. It's mine! Do you hear that? I want that part! I'd get into shape, I'd have a transplant, I don't care. That is just a cool role. And it needs someone who is very physical.

When I was working on KING KONG, they had just finished LOGAN'S RUN, and I got to see all the equipment they had being pulled apart. And I thought it was just so much fun, being on the set. Ninety percent of making films is waiting around, but at least if it's something interesting, like science fiction, it's worth waiting around for. Special effects are fabulous!

LYMAN: *How did you get to be doing stunt work on KING KONG?*

KELLY: When you first come to Hollywood, there's a couple of agencies you can join that will get you walk-ons, album covers, semi-nude stuff — a lot of the junk people won't do because they've already made it —

LYMAN: *The stuff people do to get started.*

KELLY: Yes, but legitimate stuff. Hal, the guy who ran the agency I was with, was a former cameraman who had all these incredible connections with the studios. I had done a stunt for a spy thing on TV — where a big safety box fell on top of me. It was supposed to miss me but it didn't, so they used that shot instead. That was my first stunt, and I told Hal about it, and he thought that was really cute. The next thing he knows, he gets a call from MGM saying they wanted a girl who can double for **Jessica Lange**. She was in New York, and people shooting KING KONG had these two giant ape hands that they wanted to get used to using on a girl. Also, if there was something they couldn't do with **Jessica Lange**, they want a girl who could double for her. My hair at the time was really close to hers — real blondish — and I went down there with three other girls. They gave me the part right away because the costume fit

VAMPIRELLA — a Kelly Nichols favorite. **Art by Tom Sutton.**

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"Comics conventions are generally rip-offs."

me, and because I had done stunt work. They verified that because they wanted to make sure I wasn't a wimp. I knew why when I walked in — a giant crane was coming down with this hand about the size of two couches. The thumb was about as long as I am. I sat in the palm, and they had about five men operating it

They said, "It's as simple as this — we have to know how to work it because it has to pick Jessica up, pull down her blouse with one finger, and then drop her. And we want to try that on you." It wasn't that bad. It really was a lot of fun. The thing was, they didn't have any control. Like, the finger would come down and I was like . . . *(drops her voice as if she's choking, while miming a giant finger pressing down on her) "I can't breathe!"* It was funny because when you saw it on the screen it looked fake but in person it looked *real*. **Dino De Laurentiis** was being very secretive about it. There was a rumor they would be using a giant robot. And they did have a robot. You could see it in maybe two scenes

LYMAN: *It looked like shit.*

KELLY: It was big, and it actually did move, but the head was square instead of monkey-faced, but it actually couldn't do much. It was great publicity, because a lot of people went to see the movie just to see this giant robot. **De Laurentiis'** people were trying to make the public think that the robot did everything in the film, when in fact they showed me all the King Kongs they had: little ones you saw in the distance, and seven masks, with various Kong facial expressions for the close-ups. They would show the mask smiling, or upset and moody, or whatever, and then cut to the guy in the ape suit.

LYMAN: *How long did you work with the big ape-hand?*

KELLY: For two weeks. The funniest thing was when I was sitting with my back to the thumb, sipping from a carton of milk. Somebody — either as a joke or an accident — knocked me flying six to eight feet — five feet above the ground — and I sailed across the room and then just dropped. It was amazing that it had that much power. It scared me badly.

LYMAN: *Let's talk about your other films, TOOLBOX MURDERS and CATSPAW.*

KELLY: As a matter of fact, we just saw it about a month ago, at the dive around the corner. The guy in the theater promised to send me the poster because it has me on it. I'm so excited. I'll have this picture of me looking like this . . . *(Kelly mimes looking dead).*

LYMAN: *How did that maniac kill you in that movie?*

KELLY: Cameron Mitchell plays this guy who's out to get any girl who looks slightly tarty. He doesn't want his daughter to become a tart. He carries around this toolbox, and the first girl gets it with a buzzsaw and the second girl gets it with a nail gun. And he's singing while he's going around murdering these people. It's great — whistle while you work! I was the third victim, and it was neat because they gave me a lot of play. He comes over while I'm taking a bath. It's kind of an erotic scene and I'm not supposed to be paying any attention to anything. I get up out of the tub and he's standing there with a mask on and a nail gun pointed at me. I run by him, trip on his toolbox, and we have a great chase scene through the living room. He fires a

An illustration by Virgil Finlay, one of Kelly's artistic heroes.

© 1971 Beverly C. Finlay

"I'm a tense person, and if I haven't

nail at me, and it hits, piercing me in the throat. I run into the bedroom, and I'm naked on the bed, saying, "Please, please, just put the gun down and I'll do anything you say, please" — tears and all that good stuff. And he puts the gun down and starts climbing on the bed, and — vroom! — I roll off the bed and start for the door, and he shoots. Phoom! They had squibs wired to my head, under my hair, and the nail goes through my forehead. The blood goes *zoop!* — all over a poster of the girl on the wall. They already have a nail with skin hanging from it on the wall. And they just had to have the guy pulling the nails out! *(Makes the sound effect of the nail being pulled out. Laughter.)* That kind of stuff is so *exploitive*, but fun. I enjoy it.

LYMAN: *Then you did CATSPAW . . .*

KELLY: Another victim film. It had cats that were programmed to kill, and this time I was the second victim. What they did, for the shot of the cats ganging up on me, was put twenty or thirty cats in one small room, and then open the door and have them run out at me. If you put that many cats in a small room, they're going to come charging out just to leave the room. So when they open the door, I'm on the floor going, "Aaaaaaaahhh!" — and the cats are going, "Where's the door? Where's the door?" *(Laughter.)* Then they would throw cats on top of me to get little clips of me being mauled by cats. It was really sick, the end result that I was all bloodied up, of course. They showed my hair all torn out on one side, and gashes all over my skull. That was kind of funny because to get that effect they had to get **Rick Baker**, who I knew because he worked over at CHIC magazine when I was there doing makeup.

LYMAN: *He designed the monkey suit for KING KONG, too.*

KELLY: The one the guy got into? I didn't know that — that's interesting. He's a real sweetheart. We both did special effects for CHIC — bruises, cuts, or all-white or all-gold makeup, things like that. I'm a licensed makeup artist in California, with special effects as my forte.

LYMAN: *How did you get into adult films?*

KELLY: My first one was called BON APETIT, and it was shot all over Europe. I'd just broken up a marriage — my husband left me — and I was in New York, not knowing anyone. **Chuck Vincent**, the porno director, asked me, "How would you like $12,000 and a trip to Europe?" Hey, I'm going to walk away from that? I had just finished a non-porno film for Chuck, CHEERLEADERS' WET T-SHIRT CONTEST. I was the one with the bouncing boobs. And I knew by that time that Chuck was gay, so it wasn't like he was hitting on me, offering me the trip to Europe. It was great! I got to see all of Europe. ABC, which was shooting 20/20 there, showed us some of the best spots to shoot in Paris. They even got us to the top of the Eiffel Tower. We didn't shoot any of the porno stuff, so if anyone checked our film they would just find footage of the countryside, with a couple embracing. Outside of Italy, they stopped us because they saw the film cans. So we piled the cans underneath us and sat on top of them, and went to the next border

Kelly's own cartoon creation, Mr. Zen, conducting a focused meditation. Pencils by Kelly Nichols, inks by Joe Rubinstein.

used up all my energy, I like to wrestle."

crossing, and even though we were sitting a little high, they let us right in. Then we came back to New York and for one solid week filmed the bedroom scenes. It was an interesting approach to making a porno film.

LYMAN: *What do you do to unwind after work?*

KELLY: I put on some nice, meditative music — some **Kitaro** or some **Bach** — and hang upside down in my inversion boots. I'm a tense person, and if I haven't used up all my energy, I like to rollerskate, bike, play raquetball, squash or handball, and I like to wrestle.

LYMAN: *Wrestle? Men or women?*

KELLY: Both. I'm a semi-professional wrestler. I belong to **Joanie Weiss'** Fighting Women. That's a club that seventy five to one hundred men belong to. They call up Joanie and say, "Set me up with one of your girls." And I'll go over to their place, or they'll come here, for wrestling. I prefer them to come here because my futon couch can be turned into a wrestling mat. I wear a leotard and tights. Most of these guys just want women to beat them up. I'm sure it's subliminally sexual. A lot of the guys are really bright — doctors, lawyers, veterinarians — and under thirty.

LYMAN: *But it's not a heavy masochism trip.*

KELLY: No. I keep wondering what it is about. There was only one guy who could explain it. He was twenty-three and lived with his mother. He runs in marathons and is a tennis champion, but he looks like a real wimp. He says he likes to fight with women on an even basis instead of having to go to a bar and trying to wheedle a girl into it.

LYMAN: *Do you still draw?*

KELLY: Oh, yes. It's frustrating, because with my art I'm really centered on it, or I'm just doodling. And when I'm doodling, it's with a bit of sadness because I would like to *really* get into my art.

LYMAN: *What medium do you use?*

KELLY: Acrylics and oils, and I also like scratchboard. Both my paintings and my scratchboards are pretty unreal.

LYMAN: *Is your scratchboard work influenced much by Finlay?*

KELLY: Yes. In fact, everything that I've done in scratchboard has always been related to **Virgil Finlay**. I was so fascinated by the effects he got. When I first didn't know how to use a scratchboard, I would think of **Finlay**'s work — almost like I was taking pictures. It helped my thinking.

LYMAN: *You said you wanted to draw comic strips when you were a kid. I've seen the little Mr. Zen character you've created. Have you done anything with him yet?*

KELLY: I don't know what I will do with him yet. I'd like to draw comic books rather than a comic strip. I'd like to draw the women in the sexy outfits. I'd love to draw the men in TEEN TITANS and think of new outfits for the guest stars. I was really good in human anatomy because I used to draw the bunched-up muscles I would see in THE SILVER SURFER and other comics. In anatomy class, when we went into the muscles, I didn't even know the names of the muscles but I already knew how to draw them.

LYMAN: *If you could be any superheroine, which one would you be?*

KELLY: The Black Widow. She's hot!

LYMAN: *What have seen in comics lately that you like?*

KELLY: TWISTED TALES. I have an affinity for horror tales. I *love* **H. P. Lovecraft.**

LYMAN: *Did you read his stuff in the pulps?*

KELLY: No. What caught me was the art on one of his books. As I was looking at the art, I glanced at the cover copy and the story sounded intriguing, so I bought it, and I was hooked. Unfortunately, after the sixth book, I noticed a definite pattern to his work. I wanted him to create different creatures, but he kept going back to the same monsters. There's no surprise in art. *(After a lengthy digression about horror novels, Kelly takes a couple of books from her collection and lends them to Lyman.)*

LYMAN: *Thanks. You know, you don't fit what I would assume is the stereotype of a porno actress. One would expect them all to be dumb bimbos, and you're certainly not.*

KELLY: There are a lot of girls in this business who are very bright — **Samantha Fox, Veronica Hart.** There are, I would say, a small percentage of the women who are very serious about their acting, and are very intelligent.

LYMAN: *How does it feel to be a porno celebrity?*

KELLY: Strange. I've done almost twenty-five films — fifteen of them in the last year. I do not want to be in porn in another couple of years, so while I'm hot, I'll stick with it. I'm riding the bandwagon now.

Photo: Steve Bryant

Hanging around and reading a pulp magazine — Kelly Nichols relaxes.

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LAST WORD

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

THE SHE-HULK MUST DIE!

Dear DAK,

This letter is in reply to **Amy Suck**'s response to my letter from a previous issue. I would like to raise a counterpoint to her point.

Amy, you ignorant slu—oops, I better not use that **Dan Aykroyd** line here. I don't think Amy would find it very funny, since judging by her letter, it's obvious she has no sense of humor

In her letter, Amy makes a lot of assumptions regarding the reasons for my hatred of the She-Hulk. However, her assumptions are way off and totally groundless. Amy seems to feel that since I resent the She-Hulk, I am totally opposed to strong female characters. Now, let me state right here that I am not against aggressive women — at least, not as often as I'd like to be. (Sorry, I couldn't resist borrowing a line from **Benny Hill**.) In fact, two of my favorite heroines are the Black Widow and the Scarlet Witch — both of whom are very strong-willed and independent.

No, my loathing for the She-Hulk stems from something far deeper than that. In a nutshell, what it all comes down to is this: I don't like rip-offs. And the She-Hulk, no matter how you look at her, is nothing more than a rip-off of the Hulk. If the She-Hulk had come first, then I'd like her and hate the Hulk.

It's just that I can't stand the fact that any time a male character is popular, they automatically come out with a female version of the same character. Batman and Batgirl — Superman and Supergirl — the Six Million Dollar Man and the Bionic Woman — the Man from UNCLE and the Girl from UNCLE — the list is endless.

For some reason, writers always take the easy way out instead of doing something original. It doesn't take any intelligence to duplicate the powers of a male character in a woman. Yet never before in history has there been a male rip-off of a female character, that I know of. If you can find an example, I'd be surprised. It just doesn't seem to work the other way.

Perhaps Amy is unaware of how the She-Hulk came to be. It seems Universal Studios (the producers of THE HULK TV show) wanted to do a female version of the show. The only way Marvel could stop them was to do a comic version of the She-Hulk so they could establish ownership of the character. Once this was done, Universal could not do the She-Hulk on TV. (Reportedly, Spider-Woman and Ms Marvel were created for similar reasons.) Having published at least one comic with the She-Hulk in it, Marvel was no longer obligated to do anything with the character. However, astoundingly, it seems some Marvel staffers grew attached to the character, and continue to use the character today. I think this is an abominable situation which should be discontinued immediately. I wouldn't mind if S-H went the same route as Ms Marvel and Spider-Woman.

As the former, proud president of the Committee to Cancel the She-Hulk and the Committee to Take the She-Hulk Out of the Avengers, and the current chairman of the Committee to Remove the She-Hulk from the Fantastic Four and Obliterate Her Completely, I vow to never rest until the She-Hulk is destroyed for good. We, the American people, should stand up and fight for our rights. We shouldn't let these rip-offs be thrust upon us. Anyone who likes the She-Hulk is not a *true* True Believer.

But you're right, Amy — it is wrong for me to "malign fictional characters." Therefore, from now on, I will malign only real people, such as yourself. By the way, Amy, don't you have anything better to do than defend fictional characters.?

(By this point, DAK, you probably regret having this whole conflict raging in your letters pages — but just remember, it's all your fault! You were the one who remembered me as the guy who hated the She-Hulk! Besides, a little controversy is good for sales — just ask THE COMICS JOURNAL!)

Hopefully, everyone else is taking this whole anti-She-Hulk thing with the same good humor and "all-in-good-fun" approach that I'm intending it in. That reminds me, DAK — I have a great idea! You could do a special issue of COMICS INTERVIEW in which you ask all the top pros how much they hate the She-Hulk. I'm sure you could easily fill up an issue with anti-She-Hulk comments.

Say, has anybody noticed the large number of comics pros who live in New

The ever-popular (?) She-Hulk. Art by John Byrne.

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Jersey? In issue #9 alone, you interviewed **Gardner Fox** from Cranbury, **Joe Kubert** from Dover, **Adrienne Roy** from Patterson, and **Bob Pinaha**, who lives just about forty-five minutes away from me in Highland Park. I tell ya, this issue really had that "down-home" feeling for me, what with so many of your interview subjects so close by. It's encouraging to see that so many of my fellow Jersey-ites are making a living in comics, since I plan to do the same some day.

Continued success with COMICS INTERVIEW, DAK — your God-Size Issue #9 was a resounding success.

Barry Dutter
2283 Old Farm Road
Scotch Plains, NJ 07076

THAT GUY

Dear David:

I was reading through COMICS INTERVIEW #8 when I got to the **Warren Reece** interview. His name didn't ring any bells until I was reading along and got to the part where he mentioned THE TOMORROW SHOW appearance he made. **Warren Reece**! That guy!! His appearance created quite a stir in the fan press at the time because of the poor image he gave of the average comics fan. It was obvious on the **Snyder** show that **Reece** was a rabid Marvel fan because he all but ignored **Infantino** and **Schwartz**, and his bored attitude toward DC was ill disguised. Someone who thinks that the sun rises and sets on Marvel Comics is not a comics fan, he's a Marvel fan. There's a big difference. Comics are created by talent, not just a single company. He mentions no one else but Marvel throughout the interview. His only mention of DC is to disdain the importance of ACTION #1, and what does he use as a standard? Timely Comics. How come **Jim Salicrup** didn't question Warren about the world beyond Marvel? How about people like **Hal Foster** and **Alex Raymond**? How about EC Comics? What about DC in the Sixties, or DC today? What about foreign strips like JUDGE DREDD? What about Pacific Comics? Or **Will Elsner**? Does he care? We sure don't know.

As to the critical reaction to his TOMORROW SHOW appearance, I believe that much of it was expressed in **Don & Maggie Thompson**'s column in TBG at the time so you might see if you can get copies of those comments to better understand the ire that **Reece** aroused. All I could think when I saw him on the show at the time was, "Where did they dig up this guy?" He couldn't have created a poorer image of comics fans if he'd tried.

James Van Hise
13226 Laurel Street
Lakeside, CA 92040

SHE-HULK DESERVES PRAISE!

Dear Dave and Crew,

Okay, I've had enough! Sprinkled throughout the fan press, here and there for a long time, even in the very pages of COMICS INTERVIEW, have been disparaging comments about She-Hulk and especially about the 25-issue run of her own mag. Now, I'll admit that the reasons for her coming into being were not particularly inspired: to prevent copyright infringement of a female version of the Hulk by someone else. But that's as far as I go. The first four or five issues of her mag were admittedly mediocre, but from that point on, her series was consistently interesting and different — certainly not deserving of the harsh comments it has gotten; in fact, deserving of a substantial amount of praise. Even today, the She-Hulk has far more potential than most characters, even if it hasn't been realized since the demise of her mag. (For one thing, I keep wondering about Jen Walters.)

There, I said it! This isn't an attempt to ingratiate myself with you, Dave. The Maple speaks his mind! (What there is of it, anyway.) I thought that at INTERVIEW, I would at least not be immediately consigned to the round file. Besides, if you're big enough to publish (unfair) criticism of the She-Hulk, you deserve to know that not everyone feels that way.

Now on to COMICS INTERVIEW #8.

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I found the interview with **Warren Reece** to be quite interesting. But one matter wasn't covered, a matter that I think of whenever I read of collectors of Golden Age comics: How does he afford to buy these old comics? The easy answer is that he's independently wealthy. But I got the suspicion from the article that he has financed his collection by trading off his duplicates and building his collection stage by stage as these prices skyrocketed. Is this the case? If so, such a method of accumulating Golden Age comics cannot be used now, as the buy-in point is simply too high.

I would also be quite interested to see a piece sometime examining why people *collect* comics. To my mind, there are at least three categories of people who buy comics: investors (interested only in monetary aspects), collectors (interested more in the comics), and readers (more interested in the contents than the collecting). Of course, there is overlap amongst these categories. But why do collectors collect comics rather than coins, stamps, matchbook covers, beer cans, or whatever? Why do some collect but not read? Do most comic-book collectors collect *only* comics? Or do they collect everything? Or are there usually related items? (Well, there are, but to what extent?) I know this is a bit off the beaten track for your publication, but an interview with a knowledgeable person in this matter could be quite interesting, as the influence of the collector is more and more pervasive in the comics field. Another thought: Why is it that only a few short years ago, writers (eg. **Englehart, Gerber**) had cult followings, but now collectors seem almost entirely focused on artists?

The "two-sided interview" between **Mike Baron** and **Steve Grant** was quite interesting. There was a danger that it could have devolved into a self-serving, you-help-me-plug-and-I'll-help-you exercise, but instead what came across was two professionals exploring the field and each other's creations. It was a more give-and-take (informationally speaking) atmosphere than the usual question-answer format.

The WORLD'S FINEST #300 plotting conference? Gee, you've really disillusioned me. There I was thinking that all comic-book stories were meticuously planned after a blinding light of creative inspiration.

T.M. Maple
Box 1272, Station B
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By now, you've no doubt read part two of the interview, in issue #9, and realize that Warren did indeed discuss the matter of collecting Golden Age comics today. In his words: "Anyone starting with the money I had to work with at the time, would find it impossible."

—DAK

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NEXUSSUS—HEMBECK DESTROYS THE MARVEL UNIVERSE! Cartoonist *Fred Hembeck* kills off the Marvel Superheroes and lives to tell all about it, in this wild and macabre interview! *Steve Englehart*, outspoken scripter (BATMAN, THE AVENGERS, CAPTAIN AMERICA, COYOTE) gives the lowdown on his stormy comics career in and out of Marvel! And at last we turn the tables on THE COMICS JOURNAL and grill *Gary Groth & Kim Thompson* of Fantagraphics! Much more! With a *Hembeck* cover you'll have to see to believe! Don't miss COMICS INTERVIEW #14!

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- ... Marvel & DC Present
- ... Marvel Age (Newsst)
- ... Marvel Fanfare
- ... Marvel Tales
- ... Marvel Team-Up
- ... Micronauts
- ... Moon Knight
- ... New Mutants
- ... Official Handbook of the Marvel Universe
- ... Peter Parker
- ... Powerman & Iron Fist
- ... Rom
- ... Star Wars
- ... The Thing
- ... Thor
- ... U.S. !
- ... What If ?
- ... X-Men
- ... Any Limited Series
- ... Any One-shot
- ... Any Marvel #1
- ... Any Marvel #1 (No reprints)
- ... All Marvel Annuals
- ... Any "Basket" reprints
- ... Selected Marvel Annuals

EPIC COMICS
- ... Coyote
- ... Dreadstar
- ... Any Epic #1

MARVEL MAGAZINES
- ... Epic Illustrated
- ... Marvel Graphic Novel
- ... Marvel Super Special
- ... Savage Sword

DC COMICS
- ... Action
- ... All Star Squadron
- ... Amethyst, Princess of Gem World
- ... Arak
- ... Axon
- ... Atari Force
- ... Batman
- ... Batman & The Outsiders
- ... Blackhawk
- ... Blue Devil
- ... Camelot 3000
- ... Captain Carrot
- ... DC Comics Presents
- ... Detective
- ... Flash
- ... Fury of Firestorm
- ... G.I. Combat
- ... Green Lantern
- ... House of Mystery
- ... Jonah Hex
- ... Justice League
- ... Legion of Superheroes
- ... New Teens Showcase
- ... New Teen Titans
- ... Night Force
- ... Omega Men
- ... Ronin (Frank Miller)
- ... Saga of Swamp Thing
- ... Sgt. Rock
- ... Superboy
- ... Supergirl
- ... Superman
- ... Vigilante
- ... Warlord

DC COMICS
- ... Wonder Woman
- ... World's Finest
- ... Zero Hero
- ... Adventure Digest
- ... Best of DC Digest
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- ... Any DC #1 (No reprints)
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- ... All DC Annuals
- ... Selected DC Annuals
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FIRST COMICS
- ... American Flagg
- ... Arak
- ... Mars
- ... Jon Sable Freelance
- ... Starslayer
- ... Warp
- ... Warp Special
- ... Any First Comics #1

PACIFIC COMICS
- ... Alien Worlds
- ... Berni Wrightson (Master of the Macabre)
- ... Captain Victory
- ... Edge of Chaos
- ... Elric of Melnibone
- ... Groo, the Wanderer
- ... Mr. Mystic
- ... Pacific Presents
- ... Quest and Other Tales
- ... Silver Star
- ... Somerset Holmes
- ... Twisted Tales
- ... World of Wood
- ... Any Pacific One-shot
- ... Any Pacific #1

RED CIRCLE
- ... Black Hood
- ... Blue Ribbon
- ... Comet
- ... Fly

RED CIRCLE
- ... Cutlass (Magazine)
- ... Harry Man
- ... Jaguar
- ... Mighty Crusaders
- ... Shield
- ... Thunder Bunny
- ... Any Red Circle #1
- ... Any Red Circle Mini-series

IMPORTS
- ... Dr. Who Monthly (Marvel U.K.)
- ... Cinema (Marvel U.K.)
- ... Dan Dare (Dragon's Dream)
- ... Starburst (Marvel U.K.)
- ... Warrior (Quality)

TITAN BOOKS, LTD.
- ... A & C Warriors
- ... Chantry's War
- ... Comic Tales (color)
- ... Garth
- ... Jeff Hawke
- ... Judge Dredd
- ... Nemesis

SPECIAL EFFECTS MAGAZINES
- ... American Cinematographer
- ... American Fantasy
- ... Creepy Magazine
- ... Cinefex
- ... Cinemagic
- ... Fangoria
- ... Fantastic Films
- ... Starlog
- ... Starlog Guidebooks

ARCHIE COMICS
- ... If Ah!

WHITMAN COMICS
- ... If Ah!

ALTERNATIVE COMICS
- ... Az (Comico)
- ... Badger, The (Capital Publ.)
- ... Beyond
- ... Bissally Strange
- ... Cerebus
- ... Comico Primer
- ... D'Arc Tangent
- ... Domino Chance
- ... Elfquest
- ... First Kingdom
- ... Visitors
- ... Gates of Eden (Fantacor)
- ... Grendel (Comico)
- ... Hall of Fame (John C. Publ.)
- ... Hembeck (Fantacor)
- ... Hugo
- ... Journey (A. Vanaheim)
- ... Justice Machine (Noble)
- ... Ken Pierce Reprint Series
- ... Love & Rockets
- ... Masterworks Series
- ... Nine the Hense (A. Vanaheim)
- ... Nemo (Classic Comics Library)
- ... Nexus (Capital Publ.)
- ... Pogo: The Sweetheaven Sale
- ... Skrog (Comico)
- ... Slaughterman (Comico)
- ... Southern Knights (formerly, The Crusaders)
- ... Spirit (Kitchen Sink)
- ... Star Fighters
- ... Star Rider & The Peace Machine
- ... Stevie Canyon (Kruppi)
- ... Survivors Spectrum)
- ... Swords of Cerebus
- ... Thunder Agents (John C. Publ.)
- ... Voyages (Nautilus Dreams)
- ... Whisper (Capital Publ.)

ECLIPSE COMICS
- ... Airtec Ace
- ... Destroyer Duck
- ... DNAgents
- ... Eclipse
- ... "Hall of Fame Series"

ECLIPSE COMICS
- ... John Law (W. Eisner)
- ... Mr. T
- ... Sabre
- ... Scorpio Rose
- ... Any Eclipse #1

AMERICOMICS
- ... Americomics
- ... Americomics Special
- ... Black Diamond
- ... Bolt & Star Force 6
- ... Fun Comics
- ... Sentinels of Justice
- ... Any Americomics #1

EAGLE COMICS
- ... Judge Dredd (color)

FAN MAGAZINES
- ... Amazing Heroes
- ... Bondage (James Bond)
- ... Comic Book Price Guide
- ... Update #2
- ... Comic Fandom's Forum
- ... Comic Informer
- ... Comic News
- ... Comic Reader
- ... Comics Collector
- ... Comics Feature
- ... Comics Interview
- ... Comics Journal
- ... Comics Scene
- ... Enterprise Incidents
- ... Fanfare
- ... Fantasy Chronicles Series
- ... Fantastic Explorer
- ... Fantasy Book (SF)
- ... Fantasy Empire
- ... Fantasy Images
- ... Golden Age of Comics
- ... Marvel Comics Index
- ... Panels
- ... Prevue
- ... RBCC
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